



Helping a Loved One Move into a Skilled Nursing Facility

Here are things family can do—before, during and after the move.

Making a move to a new home can be stressful. For those moving into a skilled nursing facility, the stress can seem overwhelming – not only does one have to adjust to a new living space, but there also are the added stressors of concerns about privacy, health and well-being.

It's no wonder there may be resistance from an elderly loved one when discussing moving into a nursing facility, even if they're aware they need assistance in living more safely and managing their health conditions. Here are some tips to help start a conversation and help them understand the importance of making the move.

Start discussing the issue before the situation is critical

Look for opportunities to bring up the subject of aging safely. It's highly likely your loved one knows of people undergoing similar challenges. If they discuss a friend who is making a move to a nursing facility, ask them how they would feel about such a move and be prepared to discuss advantages.

Come from a place of empathy and understanding

Be willing to hear opposing points of view. If your loved one gets that you understand their position, they will be more willing to listen to what you have to say. If they shut down during a conversation, try to understand how frightening it would be for anyone to talk about a future that may involve illness, decline, and moving from a home that may hold special memories. Once you understand what is underneath the resistance, you are in a better position to help move things forward in a gentle and caring way.



Offer to help find a solution

Invite your loved one to take a tour of nursing facilities in the area. After seeing what's available, they may be more receptive to the idea of a move. Let them know they're not in this alone and you'll be with them along the way. Be sure you find a facility that can meet their care needs and offers a homelike environment, where they will feel comfortable. Take a look at the facility's activities schedule – you want your loved one to remain engaged with others.

Once your loved one is in agreement about making the move, here are some things you can do to help ensure they are comfortable in their new surroundings and are adjusting to their new routine:

Be there on moving day and help them settle in

Almost all moves are physically and emotionally exhausting. As a caregiver, the best thing you can do on Moving Day is to be present and ready to support your loved

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Techno-Caregiving: When You're Mom's Help Desk

It's the call in the night that every caregiver dreads. No, your elderly relative hasn't fallen or been rushed to the hospital. This time it's a computer virus. Or, Mom clicked on something in Word and now she can't get rid of those page borders. Maybe Grandpa can't access the address book on his smartphone. If you can identify with these scenarios, you're not alone!

More older adults are using computers, tablets and smartphones, and that's great news, say experts. Using these devices for email, web surfing, social networking and video communicating helps keep seniors mentally active and socially connected. They're going online to read the news and learn about their health conditions. They're staying connected with caregivers and their healthcare team with texts, email, online portals and monitoring systems. The AARP reports that one-third of people older than 55 play video games. Says CEO Jo Ann Jenkins, "Video games and apps are truly ageless, offering gamers of all ages — a grandfather as well as his granddaughter — the opportunity to share entertainment and social interactions with one another."

But the digital revolution has opened up a new can of worms for family caregivers, who already do so much to support the well-being of elderly loved ones. It's a myth that seniors aren't computer-savvy. Many are. But many others came late to the game, dragged online because that's where the action — and the family — is today. Computer technology is complicated and ever-evolving. It's hard enough for many younger people, for whom computers are second nature, to keep up!

"In a world where many everyday activities have moved online, caregivers face a new challenge: finding a balance between autonomy and protection of care recipients," said Northwestern University professor Anne Marie Piper. "Technological caregiving is a new form of work. We hear about the physical, financial and social stress of caregiving, but no one ever talks about the burden caregivers feel to keep people active online, which we feel is a fundamental part of participating in society."

Here are eight ways to help older loved ones successfully navigate the new world of connectivity:

Designate a tech-support family member. Maybe you're not so computer-savvy yourself? Who is your go-to person when something crashes? Perhaps a granddaughter



or nephew is particularly skilled — and patient. Ask if they will sign on to help your senior relative. These days, many wonderful intergenerational connections are enriched in this very way. Pick someone who you think can communicate and explain things well.

Choose the right technology for your loved one's needs. If you're selecting a computer or phone for your loved one, remember that the more bells and whistles, the more complicated the learning curve. Buy from a company that can help you make an informed choice. If your loved one has disabilities such as visual impairment and arthritis, learn about hardware and software accessibility features to help them navigate and read. And if you're the go-to tech support person, having the same operating systems (PC vs. Mac, iPhone vs. Android) is a good idea. The same goes for applications your loved one may be wanting to use, as you may be called upon to help with those as well.

Suggest that your loved one sign up for computer classes. Many computer "problems" stem from a user's unfamiliarity with features of their devices and programs. This is far from a seniors-only challenge, and many organizations and companies offer computer training, but your loved one may be most comfortable in a senior-focused training class. Check out the offerings of your local senior services agency, community college, senior centers, parks and recreation department or your loved one's senior living community. Online courses are also available.

Create a mini user guide. You have a pretty good idea

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about what your folks want to do with their computer, and how much they know. As you walk them through the computer tasks they'll often be doing, write down step-by-step instructions to serve as a cheat sheet until they have it down. And don't be like "Nick Burns, Your Company's Computer Guy" from the old Saturday Night Live sketches, who would say "Moouoooooove!" while he pushed the user aside. If you step in to do something yourself, explain what you're doing.

Be there when you can't be there. It's hard to help when you can't see what's happening. Use Skype or Facetime to take a peek at the exact problem on your loved one's screen. Here again, having the same program on their computer as you have on yours is a big help. Or better yet, install remote access software to view and take charge of their computer from afar. (In person or remotely, resist the temptation to overdo it while you're logged in by making "helpful" changes to their organization system or desktop icons that will be confusing and NOT helpful!)

Be sure their antivirus software is kept up to date. The criminals who create viruses release new ones nonstop, so it's vital to always have the latest updates to identify and block viruses and other malicious intrusions. (While you're at it, warn them about "scareware" — the ubiquitous fake antivirus programs that pop up and trick users into buying unneeded software or downloading a harmful program.)

Have the safety and security talk. Antivirus software can't ward off all intruders. Just as you install the software, you'll also need to install a bit of skepticism as your loved ones venture online. Warn them about protecting their personal information, phishing and pharming. They should know that scammers might hijack a friend's email ... or pretend to be from Microsoft or Apple tech support ... or even, in the case of the infamous Grandma Scam, pretend to be you! It can sound pretty scary, but it's empowering to be in the know. Establish a "no question is too dumb" policy: Tell them it's fine to call you if something doesn't seem right.

Call in a professional. If computer help isn't your thing — maybe you need it as much as your loved one does, or you don't have the time or temperament for the task — check out tech support services that charge an hourly rate or an annual subscription fee. These services have been likened to roadside assistance for your computer. Help can be provided in the store, or technicians can remote in to remove a virus, tune up a computer or help with app installation. Some services cater to senior clients, with technicians who are familiar with the learning style of older adults.

Providing tech support for a senior loved one isn't a small thing, many caregivers know. But it pays off in helping your loved one stay connected and engaged. It's truly a labor of love.

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Aging and Caregiving in the News

Information, updates and interesting tidbits from across the country and around the world.

In this issue:

- Texting while driving dulls our "sixth sense."

Online at www.rpbmessenger.com:

- Family may notice memory loss before their loved one does.
- Video gamers, watch out for this ailment.

One More Reason Not to Text While Driving

Some people justify sneaking a quick text message while driving with thoughts along these lines: "If I let my daughter know I'm running late, I'll stop worrying and better concentrate on my driving." Is it true that driving while preoccupied or upset is dangerous? Somewhat, says a new study from the University of Houston and Texas A & M — but, the study authors say, texting is worse. The research team found that volunteers in a driving simulator handled the wheel with less skill if they were asked while driving to respond to emotionally or mentally distracting questions. However, it seems that the part of our minds that we're not using can compensate. According to study author Ioannis Pavlidis, "The driver's mind can wander and his or her feelings may boil, but a sixth sense keeps a person safe, at least in terms of veering off course." But what about when we're texting? Without eye-hand coordination to fill in, the volunteers who texted were likely to "drive" right out of their virtual lanes. Said Pavlidis, "What makes texting so dangerous is that it wreaks havoc into this sixth sense."

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Willow Ridge Healthcare
400 Deronda Street
Amery, WI 54001
(715) 268.-8171

Riverbend Senior Living
475 Golfview Lane
Amery, WI 54001
(715) 268-9949

See us at www.rphmessenger.com for more articles!

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one in feeling at home. If you can, arrange for them to meet some preselected residents who have similar interests and backgrounds. Sit with them at dinner and say positive things about their room and the other residents. Bring in some special items from their previous home – photos, knickknacks, blankets, and grandchildren’s homemade crafts – to make them feel more settled and comfortable. The more you can make their new home seem familiar, the sooner they’ll adjust to their new life.

Visit frequently

If you live in the area, visit as often as you can. If you live out of town, let your loved one know you will be checking in frequently, via phone, Skype (if available) and email and follow up on that promise. Talk to staff and let them know you’re available to discuss your loved one’s situation at any time and they can lean on you for support and guidance.

Encourage them to participate in activities

Participating in a facility’s daily activities is a great way to meet new people, have some fun and stayed connected to what’s going on. Point out all of the shopping, dining,

religious, and entertainment attractions close by and encourage them to get out when they can.

Keep a positive attitude

Always look for things to say something good about, such as “The grounds are lovely, Mom, you’ll enjoy taking your morning stroll here” or “The people here seem so nice!” However, if you get negative feedback from your loved one, don’t immediately dismiss it. Let them know you understand their feelings. Often, negative comments are just a way to express fear. Knowing that you can relate to their feelings may make them less afraid. Always remind them that you are available to them if they experience any discomfort in their new home. If they complain about something that has merit, talk to the staff and share your loved one’s concern and see if there is something the facility can do to remedy the situation.

While making a move is a scary thing, most people eventually enjoy their new home and understand that it was the best thing for their own well-being as well as the peace of mind of their children and others concerned about them.

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