

Start from a place of empathy to handle a sensitive subject with aging parents

Many seniors see themselves living at home until the end of their days. For some, facing the prospect of moving to senior living may be perceived as the end—where they lose control over their life. You might be right that moving would improve your loved one's quality of life but it's critical for their well-being to respect your parents' dignity and recognize their need to direct their own affairs. Here's how to involve your parents in a discussion about change while you play a supporting role.

Involve your siblings

- Outside the presence of your parent, invite your sisters and brothers to express their views. Talk through any disagreements and find common ground.
- Make it clear that you're not taking control of decisions: you're interested in gathering information that may influence your next steps as a family.
- Resolve issues around care and finances before talking with your parent.

Open a dialogue about moving

- Express your worries about your parent's well-being. You might say, "Here are my concerns. I can't be here as much as I'd like and I'm worried about you." Be honest and open, and expect the discussion to take more than one conversation.
- Listen to your parents' perspective: Do they feel safe living alone? Will staying in their home another year make them happier (without presenting serious safety hazards)? It's important for seniors to maintain autonomy. Let your mom come to her own decision that she is tired of struggling, doesn't feel safe or wants companionship as her social network diminishes.

Deal respectfully with denial

- It's fruitless to get into an argument about a parent's health or their struggle to manage a household. Be considerate as you gently explain your concerns about their safety, well-being and happiness.
- Instead of giving health advice, ask your mom or dad to talk to a doctor about memory issues, falls, etc. They may have an easier time taking suggestions from their physician.

Be collaborative

- If your parent's safety is a valid concern, be firm but loving: you understand how they feel about moving but the time has come to make a change for their safety.
- Invite your loved one to be a part of the research and decision-making. Ask what's important to them: Being near family? Fine dining? Living in a place that can support their changing needs? Talk about how you will work together to match their wish list with senior living residences that deliver on their priorities.
- Decide on a schedule so you can begin touring senior living locations.
- Take a moment to acknowledge the importance of your new role: you're the one offering security and comfort to your parent.