



# Talking to Your Family About Senior Care & Living

COMPLIMENTS OF



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## **Conversations about senior care are often stressful for all of those involved.**

Everyone has preconceived ideas, commitments, fears and even guilt they carry with them that make these conversations emotional and hard. With such an emotionally charged topic, starting a conversation about wanting or needing senior living services can lead to unintended emotions for your adult children. Before you begin the conversation, take these ideas into account.





## WHY YOU SHOULD TRUST US

Before we rattle off our advice, you may wonder why you should listen to us in the first place. Internet advice is a dime a dozen these days, and when you are about to broach a topic such as senior care, it is important that you do so from a vetted source. [The Arbor Company](#) operates nearly 30 senior living communities across the nation, focusing on providing quality care to seniors with varying abilities and challenges. We have won awards for some of our cutting edge programs, but are more honored when our residents and family members express that moving into an Arbor community was one of the best decisions they have made. Our local teams have worked with countless seniors and their families. We know the best parts of senior living and the hard parts, too. We've walked families through the discussions about choosing senior care communities, and we've watched as tentative seniors become social butterflies upon move in. We can help you through this transition.





# DECIDING TO TALK

If you have noticed some type of decline in your own health or the health of your spouse, it can be tempting to jump into a conversation quickly. However, some forethought is required on your part before you bring up the subject to your loved one or children. Taking some time to take a step back and gather reliable facts can assure that you are prepared to initiate the talk confidently.

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## Get the Facts About Senior Living

Before you start, it's important to make sure you have all the facts about your options. Senior living communities come in all shapes and sizes, serving seniors of many different abilities and interests. You may already know that senior living is appealing to you, but it isn't always easy to convince your family, especially since they may have their own bias against what they perceive as "nursing homes". Many people have misconceptions or stereotypes about senior living. These can come from past experiences, old memories or even television and movies. Arm yourself with facts about the senior living option you have in mind, whether it be independent living, assisted living, memory care living or skilled nursing.

Senior living communities have undergone major culture changes over the past few decades, cementing the fact that these communities are no longer stereotypical nursing homes. Here are just a few items to keep in mind when considering senior living:



**It's not just bingo!** Senior living communities feature daily activities and events for residents to participate in ranging from travel opportunities and yoga to community college lectures and Elvis impersonator socials.



**There is choice!** Communities focus on giving residents options over their environment, from the time when housekeeping services come during the week to entree choices at mealtimes.



**Socialization keeps residents healthier and happier!** Isolation is a major factor in the emotional, physical, and cognitive health issues for seniors that live at home without regular socialization. With neighbors and staff members just steps away at a senior living community, residents are more likely to stay active and healthier when living in community.



**Connection is encouraged!** Residents are encouraged to connect with their peers and greater community through all means necessary — social media, group activities, volunteerism, and planned trips.



## Know Your Opinion

Before you pitch the idea of senior living to your family or spouse, think hard about why senior living is something you want to talk about. Do you feel that your current situation is too difficult to handle? Are you worried about your own health or have safety concerns that make you feel anxious? Perhaps you are lonely at home and want more social interaction. Take some quiet time, a pen and some paper to write down your reasons why you think that senior care may be the best option at this time.

## Why Consider Senior Living?

When it comes to considering senior living, the decision is always unique to the individual. However, there are some valid shared reasons why people consider senior living.

### Here are a few reasons for you to consider:

- Higher risk for falls at home
- Noticeable memory or judgment issues that are affecting daily life
- Wandering or other safety concerns regarding memory loss (leaving stove on unattended, becoming lost or confused, etc.)
- Lack of hygiene or personal care tasks
- Absence of family or friend support system nearby for regular check-ins
- Increased medical needs
- Increased sadness, anxiety, or worry from the senior
- Normal chores are no longer doable: meal preparation, medication management, light housekeeping, etc.
- Expressed or implied feelings of loneliness
- Weight loss or other nutritional concerns

## Make an Honest Evaluation

As you are considering the reasons why senior living would be best, take some time to evaluate your ability to handle the current situation. Do you need extra help that your family is unable to provide? Perhaps you don't want to ask your family to help at all, preferring to have professional caregivers to give you the assistance that you need. Or, if you are caring for a spouse with declining health, it can be the fact that your health cannot handle the obligation any longer. In this case, you may feel some guilt. Remember though that caregiver burnout can lead to increased health concerns for you, as well as other issues such as senior abuse or neglect. If you do not feel that home is best, be honest about why.

# BEFORE THE TALK

Now that you have had some time to step back and evaluate why you believe senior living is a good option to talk about, organize your thoughts ahead of time so that you are ready to express your thoughts and feelings before the talk even begins. Going in prepared, both emotionally and intellectually, can assist you with keeping your tone appropriate and level-headed.

*“Our days are happier when we give people a bit of our heart rather than a piece of our mind.”*  
– Unknown



## Prepare with Clarity

While making a word-for-word script before the meeting is not always realistic, having a few key talking points written out can help you be sure that you are articulating your feelings and worries appropriately. Remember to consider your audience as well, and phrase your feelings and thoughts in a way that they will understand and receive it.



## Put Yourself in Others' Shoes

If you are headed to have a talk with your loved one about why you think they need some extra assistance, keep their feelings in mind and in the forefront of your agenda. This can be extremely embarrassing, humbling and even scary for your loved one. If you are headed to tell your children that you want to move to a senior community, you may be met with feelings of worry or guilt on their part. Make their feelings a priority when considering what you are going to say and phrase your feelings in a way that will best be heard. Keep your tone honest, objective and caring.



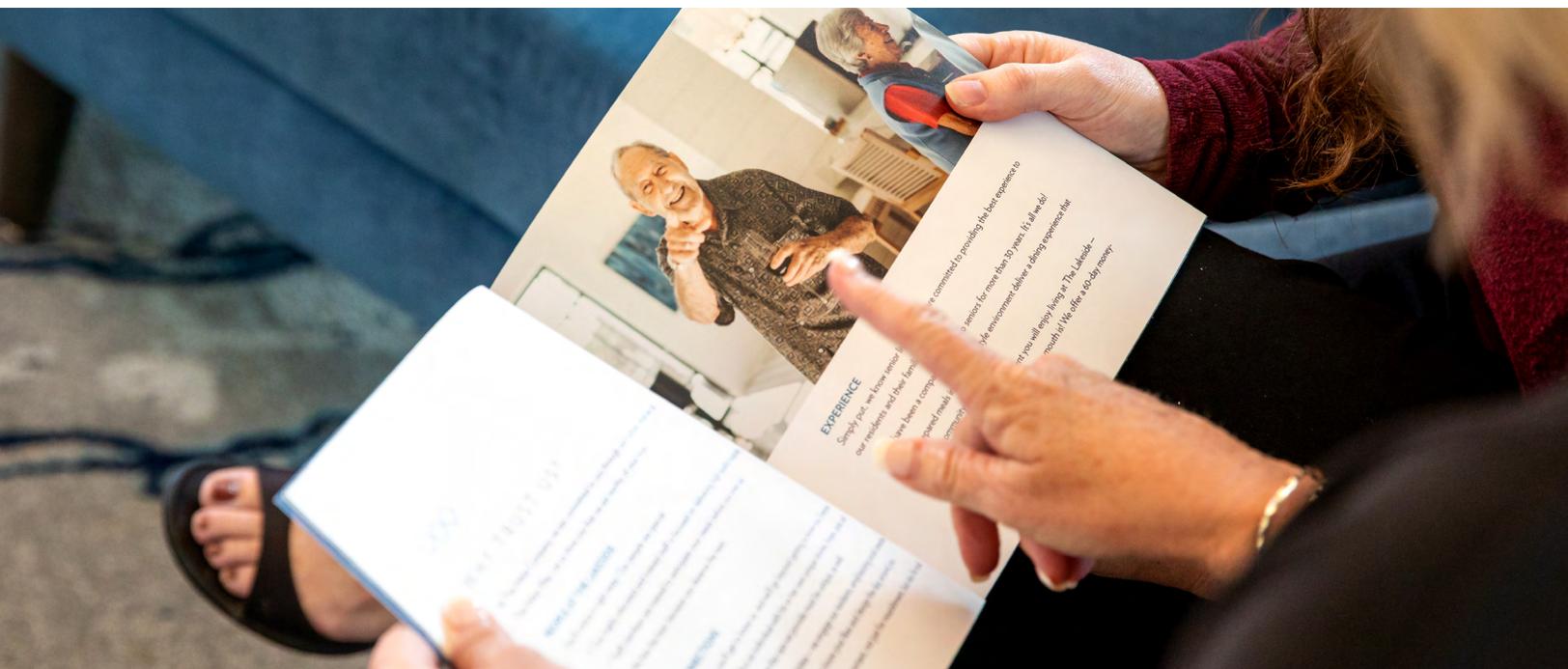
## Prepare with an Outline

Have an outline or checklist ready so that you can keep your own thoughts on task during your talk. If the situation becomes emotional, or if you find yourself veering off topic, you can easily look down at your outline to get back on track and assure that you are covering what you feel like you need to say during your conversation. That said, don't make the outline or list of items to cover too long; instead pick a few items and use those as examples to your point.



## Discuss and Plan with Other Family Members or Caregivers

You may find yourself in a position where you have to not only convince your loved one that senior care is the best option, but also to convince children or other invested family members that the decision is a sound one. In this case, you must walk a fine line of expressing your own concerns while balancing the feelings and opinions of others in the room. Consider making a plan about how to conduct the discussion before you head into the meeting, as well as bringing in any support that you may need to keep you level-headed and heard.



# HAVING THE TALK

Ensure that you are as prepared and informed as you can be, and you are ready to bring up the subject of senior living to your loved one and other family members.

*“If you want to be listened to, you should put in time listening.”*  
– Marge Piercy



## Introducing the Topic of Senior Living

Bringing up the topic of senior living in a positive way and during a good time, can actually be half of the battle. Be conscious to the timing of your discussion. Steer clear of bringing up your concerns during a high stress time or when the time doesn't allow for good discussion. For example, bringing up your spouse's memory loss during a big family Thanksgiving dinner may not be the best time for everyone to be open to hearing your concerns. Similarly, bringing up your own desire for senior living while your daughter is on the way out of the door to catch a plane may be met with negative reactions. Instead, plan ahead for a time when interested parties are all together and ready for a serious talk.



## Be Prepared for Strong Emotions

Even though you may have been considering senior living for awhile, your decision may seem abrupt or out of nowhere for your loved one or other family members. Even if you phrase it kindly, emotions can get the best of everyone, leading to unintended feelings of guilt or worry. Don't let the negative reaction keep you from gently continuing your conversation, and be sure that you are taking ample time to listen to everyone's feelings.



### **Don't Be Pushy**

If you are met with negative response or a loved one who immediately goes on the defensive, resist the urge to continue to push your views or concerns in the same way. Just because you have taken time to research and reflect on what you think is best, doesn't mean that you will be met kindly. Adapt your approach to fit the mood of the room, remaining gentle, kind and persistent. If you are having the conversation with a group of people, the dynamics of the room can vary greatly. If you have allies in the room, or people that share your viewpoints, it can be easy to work together to tear down those that may disagree with your ideas. This is especially common in family relationships, as everyone reverts into their own family roles. Resist the urge to gang up on those that do not share your opinions, opting always for kindness and listening.



### **Stand Your Ground if Needed**

Listening to the opinions and thoughts of others in the room is imperative, but this does not mean that you need to change your opinion. If you are sure this is the best decision, be firm in your stance for senior living assistance. However, understand that you may not be able to sway everyone in the room to your position with one conversation, no matter how well executed. It may take many conversations, and even the assistance of a professional such as a geriatrician or trusted doctor, before everyone gets on board with this tough decision.



# AFTER THE TALK

With the initial talk finally over, you are likely not yet done with the conversation. It can take multiple conversations for your family to finally reach an amicable and responsible decision. Remind your children and spouse that you love them and want the best for everyone involved, including yourself. For better or for worse, you are a family; a family that puts the needs of aging loved ones at the center of difficult conversations and decisions. You are not the first family to have these conversations and you will not be the last. Choose kindness and listening as you work as a team to get into a place that will keep you happy and healthy for years to come.



*“Family is not an important thing, it’s everything.”  
– Michael J. Fox*



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