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You think Dad or Mom needs Senior Housing?

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC



Linda Fodrini-Johnson is the founder of Eldercare Services, a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Counselor, and a Certified Care Manager. She is an advisor on the new Lamorinda Village Task Force that will assist seniors to stay in their own neighborhoods and homes. Contact info: linda@EldercareAnswers.com

3) Cost of all levels of care should be taken into consideration at admission even if he or she never needs extra care. Look at the contract closely - do you have to pay for care levels even when they are out of the community for several weeks. In some communities, these little details can be negotiated or discussed and often reduced or eliminated.

An aging life care manager (also called professional geriatric care manager) can assess mom's or dad's situation and come up with a plan that addresses issues such as confusion, or an unsteady balance that may not lead to a placement out of the home. This care manager will perform a comprehensive assessment that might uncover something such as dehydration, which is causing the problems and is not dementia; often they will want your parent to get a good work-up at a memory clinic before you make any decisions.

After my mother's stroke I found a wonderful assisted living facility for her. We moved all her furniture in and set it up much like her home. She needed support but thrived in that setting for almost two years until she was being taken to the hospital way too often - every time she had trouble breathing, because that was the rule according to state licensing. So, I moved her to a nice skilled nursing setting only to find she was not getting the one-on-one attention I wanted her to have.

How do you start the process when mom or dad needs senior housing? Should you ask friends, respond to ads, follow the get "free help and advice for senior's" advertisement or are there other ways? The answer could be "yes" to all, but you might make a mistake with the well-meaning friend's advice or the "free helper." They might not give you the information you need to make a good choice. Be mindful of the old saying: You get what you pay for.

Good choices give you options - from staying in your home with the support of a service like the Lamorinda Village (www.lamorindavillage.com; there are similar "Villages" all over the country) to home care, home delivered meals and/or a part-time personal assistant.

When making choices for another, there are three important considerations:

1) Make the choice based on your parent's values, likes, dislikes and needs. Don't choose a community because it fits your idea of the ideal retirement setting. Does it give mom or dad a place to swim or do fitness? Do they have day trips or art projects? If pets or gardening are important - will that be something he or she can continue to have in their lives. Can they continue to care for them as their needs change - can they have a wheelchair and what if their memory fails?

2) Be sure you have looked at all the community services, having consulted with objective professionals and the physicians about needs now and in the near future.

The hard decision for me with over 30 years of experience helping others was putting her on hospice and then moving her to a wonderful small home for six residents. In that setting she was dressed with hair and nails done and make-up on. She participated in the daily exercises and coffee hour with organized games and discussions until the very day she died. In fact, the night before she died, she did something she had never done - she asked the caregiver to take her to each resident's room to say goodnight. Finding the right place was the greatest comfort to me and my brothers.

Make good decisions; start right with a non-biased professional who is "client-centric" with extensive experience, credentials and expertise. When a move is necessary, you want to make the right one and avoid the stress of multiple moves.

I am happy to help you find an aging life care manager anywhere in the country because of my affiliation as a past president of the National Association.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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