

HOUSING CHOICES

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Almost everyone wants to remain in his or her own home, and while this is often the least expensive housing option, it also requires the most planning. On the other hand, when age, infirmity, or other factors make independent living difficult or unsafe, it may be time to look at alternatives.

In order to determine the best housing situation for your loved one's needs, consider the following steps:

- 1) Do the assessment.
- 2) Have the conversation.
- 3) Match housing to needs.
- 4) If the person can remain independent, look into support structures.
- 5) If semi-independent living seems appropriate, examine choices.
- 6) If the person is dependent, begin to evaluate facilities.

1) Do the assessment.

As you assess your loved one's housing situation, keep in mind that your ultimate task is to find the balance that protects your loved one's well-being while preserving as much of his or her independence as possible.

- | The **Needs Assessment Worksheet**, found at the end of this section, can help you make a housing determination by specifying your loved one's care requirements.
- | Have another family member do the same evaluation separately, and compare results to get an objective view.
- | Consult a doctor or health professional for help predicting future needs.
- | A private care manager can also assess your loved one's needs and provide appropriate recommendations. Look to the FamilyCare *America* Resource Locator for help finding care managers in your area.

2) Have the conversation.

Getting a loved one to accept help may be harder than finding that help in the first place. Most people, however, are more willing to accept decisions that they're involved in making. So include your loved one in the process as much and as early as possible.

- | Keep in mind that many people will not acknowledge even a small weakness because they dread any loss of independence.
- | As you explore alternatives, create opportunities for your loved one to express his or her concerns—and for you to provide additional information that may help overcome resistance to change.

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‡ If you hold a family meeting to discuss this issue, make sure your loved one's dignity and privacy are respected.

3) Match housing to needs.

Review the **Needs Assessment Worksheet** as you consider available choices, comparing the types of services offered by each. This can be a difficult and confusing time, so it's important to be organized and methodical in your approach.

‡ Don't wait until a crisis to gather information. The best decisions are usually made without time pressures.

‡ Consider your loved one's desire to continue a favorite activity or hobby, and how a change in housing might affect that ability.

‡ Take stock of what is most important in the individual's life and make sure this can be maintained, if at all possible.

‡ Remember that no choice is going to be perfect or give everyone 100 percent satisfaction. Your loved one's safety and happiness come first.

4) If the person can remain independent, look into support structures.

Repairs and modifications can make your loved one's home safer and easier to get around in. Consider how even these simple changes can make a large difference in home safety:

‡ Set the thermostat of the water heater at 120 degrees F or lower to prevent accidental scalding.

‡ As a reminder to keep the smoke alarm working, change the batteries on daylight saving's time.

‡ Locate appliances close to outlets, making sure cords run along walls and away from sinks or stoves.

‡ Install handrails and non-slip mats in the bathroom and shower.

‡ Install a ramp to allow easier access to the home.

In addition, there may be services available from the government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations that can help your loved one maintain independence.

‡ Services like "Meals on Wheels" deliver hot meals to homebound people.

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- | Local community or senior centers offer companionship, including classes, recreational opportunities, travel, volunteer opportunities, and meals.
- | Community groups or even the local police may sponsor friendly visitor programs, where volunteers make scheduled visits to isolated seniors.
- | There also are telephone reassurance programs, where volunteers call people to chat or check on their well-being.
- | So-called “gatekeeper programs” may be offered through public utilities and the Postal Service. Workers who regularly visit the home are trained to look for changes in your loved one’s condition.
- | The Area Agency on Aging can provide the names of local organizations that offer legal, financial, health-care, and other services for older adults. **5) If semi-independent living seems appropriate, examine choices.**

Sometimes the best choice is to relocate to a residence that is more manageable, or where the necessary care services and support are part of the package.

The distinctions between each kind of facility aren’t always clear, and different states may use the same term to describe very different types of facilities. Generally, however, the categories for semi-independent living and housing include:

Adult Residential Care Facilities. These licensed boarding homes provide room, board, and help with medications and personal care. Residents may also receive limited supervision.

- | Most adult care homes are single-family residential units.
- | Typical residents include frail elderly persons with chronic physical or mental disabilities, mentally ill adults, mentally retarded adults, or other adults with diminished physical and mental conditions.

Adult Family Homes. These facilities can accommodate couples and are licensed to care for up to six residents. They provide room, board, laundry, necessary supervision, assistance with activities of daily living, personal care, and social services. In most cases, nursing services are not provided, and residents must manage their own care.

Assisted Living Facilities. This has become a catchall term for any boarding home that emphasizes privacy, independence, and personal choice. Services include meals, personal care, medication assistance, limited supervision, organized activities, and limited nursing services.

- | Assisted Living is licensed by state governments and is known by as many as 26 different names including residential care, board and care, congregate care, and personal care.



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Services, style, and costs vary widely from facility to facility. Some may have a resort-style ambience while others are geared toward affordable living with few amenities.

This brand of residential care is not a substitute for a nursing facility.

Continuing Care Retirement Communities. CCRCs are designed to provide seamless transitions as care needs increase. A CCRC accepts seniors while they are still active and independent, and then provides an expanding range of caregiving services—including professional nursing care—as needed.

These facilities are privately owned. All levels of care take place on one “campus.”

These communities typically require a sizeable entry fee, plus monthly maintenance fees, in exchange for a living unit, meals, and eventual health care coverage up to the nursing home level.

Many of these communities make their services available on a month-to-month rental basis.

6) If the person is dependent, begin to evaluate facilities.

Your loved one may be in a situation where he or she can no longer care for himself or herself. Housing alternatives include:

Intermediate care facilities for people who are physically and psychologically stable, but need a nurse’s care for medications and other needs.

Skilled nursing homes for people whose conditions require 24-hour supervision, help with medications, and assistance with daily living.

Nursing Homes provide rooms, meals, recreational activities, and protective supervision to residents. Some also specialize in Alzheimer’s disease or have subunits for certain illnesses. Services vary, yet all nursing homes are licensed by states and follow federal regulations.



Needs Assessment Worksheet

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This worksheet is designed to help you and family members determine what type of assistance your loved one needs, from housing choices to transportation requirements. Determine how much aid is required for each activity or task.

Activities Of Daily Living (ADLs)

Activity	Accomplishes alone	Needs some help	Needs much help
Bathing			
Dressing			
Grooming			
Using the toilet			
Eating a nutritious diet			
Getting out of bed			
Getting out of chair			
Walking			

Instrumental Activities Of Daily Living (ADLs)

Activity	Accomplishes alone	Needs some help	Needs much help
Using the telephone			
Shopping for personal items			
Transportation			
Managing money			
Doing laundry			
Doing light housework			
Preparing meals			

Physical Challenges

How do the following affect the person's ability to function?

Limitation	No effect	Some effect	Major effect
Hearing			



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Limitation	No effect	Some effect	Major effect
Vision			
Perception			
Orientation			
Cognition			
Memory			
Grasping			
Reaching out			
Balance			
Strength			
Energy			
Bladder or bowel control			
Arthritis			
Hypertension			
Heart disease			
Diabetes			
Physical deformity			
Chronic sinusitis			
Depression			

Environmental Barriers to Everyday Living (Handicaps)

Which barriers can be removed or changed?

Limitation	No problem	Change Needed
Neighborhood:		
Safety		
Convenience		



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Limitation	No problem	Change Needed
Friends or relatives nearby		
Living Quarters:		
Condition		
Age of dwelling		
Roof in good repair		
Windows in good repair		
Siding in good condition		
Looks cared for		
Security and safety		
Dead bolt locks on outside doors		
Peephole in front door		
Window bars or locks		
Visible from road (no large trees or bushes block view)		
Smoke alarms installed, tested		
Passageways clear of wires and clutter		
Stairs:		
Free of obstacles and clutter		
Well-lit		
Handrails on both sides		
In good repair and nonskid		
Clearly marked		
Limitation	No problem	Needs to be changed
Floors:		
Nonskid level surfaces		
Nonglare surfaces		
No loose rugs		
Furnishings:		
Couch and chairs easy to use		



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Limitation	No problem	Change Needed
Tables the right height		
Bed easy to get in and out of		
Lighting:		
Light switches easy to reach		
Entries and walkways well-lit		
Reading areas well-lit		
Light diffused from windows and surfaces (no glare)		
Passageways have night lights		
Kitchen:		
Lever handles on sink		
Clean rubber mat by the sink		
Items used often are accessible		
Storage is easy to get to		
No objects are over the stove		
Well-lit		
Bathroom:		
Grab bars attached to studs, by the toilet and tub or shower		
Nonskid strips in tub or shower		
Hand-held shower head		
Nonslip bath mat or rug		