



QUICK GUIDE: CHOOSING AN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY

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National Center for Assisted Living
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A MODERN GUIDE FOR FAMILIES MAKING DECISIONS WITH LOVE

Choosing an assisted living community is one of the most personal and emotional decisions a family can make. It's about balancing safety, independence, and quality of life – and doing it in a way that honors your loved one's wishes. This guide was created to help you navigate that process with confidence, compassion, and clarity.

1. What Assisted Living Is – and Isn't

Assisted living is designed for older adults who need help with daily activities like meals, medication reminders, or bathing, but don't need full-time nursing care. The best communities provide support that keeps residents safe and preserves their independence, privacy, and dignity.

Today's assisted living communities are much more than care settings – they're vibrant environments where residents can build friendships, stay active, and live with purpose. Many now offer specialized services such as memory care, on-site therapy, telehealth, and wellness programs that support both mind and body.

2. How to Start the Search

Before you start touring, take time to reflect on what matters most to your mom or dad or loved one – and to you.

Ask yourself:

- What are their daily needs? (Mobility, meals, medications, social connection?)
- What gives them joy or comfort?
- What worries you most about them living alone?

Then, gather recommendations from friends, extended family, your doctor, clergy, trusted community members or local aging services. Make a short list of communities nearby and start visiting – ideally at different times of day to get a real sense of daily life.

3. What to Look for During a Visit

Bring a notepad or use your phone to jot down impressions. Pay attention to both the feel of the place and the facts.

Ask About:

- **Care and Support:** How do they assess each resident's needs? How often are care plans updated?
- **Staffing:** What's the staff-to-resident ratio? How are caregivers trained – especially in dementia care?
- **Wellness and Activities:** Are there fitness classes, learning opportunities, and social outings?
- **Resident Ambassadors and Orientation:** Is there a program or designated resident ambassador who helps new residents feel welcome? How do they support families during the transition?
- **Safety and Security:** Are there systems for fall detection, emergency response, and secured areas for memory care?
- **Food and Dining:** Are meals healthy and appealing? Can residents choose what they eat? Are guests welcome?
- **Community Feel:** Do residents look engaged? Do staff members know people by name?

You're not just evaluating services – you're imagining what it will feel like for your mom or dad or loved one to live there.

4. Financial Considerations

Assisted living is typically paid for through personal funds, long-term care insurance, or veterans' benefits. Medicare doesn't cover room and board, but some health services may be covered.

Ask:

- What's included in the monthly rate?
- What services cost extra (e.g., medication management, transportation)?
- How often do fees increase, and by how much?
- What happens if funds run low – is there financial assistance or Medicaid availability?
- Are there move-in fees or deposits, and are they refundable?

Tip: Don't just ask for prices – ask how the community helps families plan ahead.

5. Personal Fit and Cultural Connection

Every family is different. Look for a place that respects your mom or dad's routines, traditions, and preferences.

Ask whether the community:

- Supports specific dietary, religious, or cultural needs
- Offers bilingual staff or diverse programming
- Allows pets or visiting animals
- Encourages family involvement and open visiting hours

6. When Memory or Health Needs Change

If your loved one is living with memory loss or dementia, look for a community with specialized memory care or staff trained in person-centered dementia support. Ask how they manage transitions if care needs increase – can your parent stay in the same community, or would they need to move?

7. The Move and the Adjustment Period

Moving day often brings mixed emotions – relief, sadness, and hope. Give your mom or dad or loved one (and yourself) time to adjust. Many communities offer orientation programs or resident ambassadors who help new residents settle in and connect socially.

Stay involved, visit often, and partner with staff to make it feel like home. Small things – familiar décor, family photos, a favorite blanket – can help your loved one feel comforted and at ease.

8. Final Thoughts

Choosing assisted living is an act of love – not giving up, but showing up in a new way. Take your time, ask questions, and trust your instincts.

Your parent's story continues – and the right community can help them live it fully, safely, and with dignity.

Helpful Resources

Eldercare Locator: www.eldercare.acl.gov

Alzheimer's Association: www.alz.org

Family Caregiver Alliance: www.caregiver.org

Veterans Affairs Aid & Attendance Program: www.va.gov

Assisted Living Visit Checklist

Use this checklist to guide your visits and compare communities.

First Impressions

- ☐ The community feels warm and welcoming
- ☐ Staff and residents interact respectfully
- ☐ Clean, well-maintained, and odor-free environment

Care and Staffing

- ☐ Care plans are personalized and reviewed regularly
- ☐ Staff are trained in dementia and person-centered care
- ☐ Adequate staffing levels during day and night

Wellness and Activities

- ☐ Daily activities include fitness, learning, and social opportunities
- ☐ Transportation is available for outings and appointments
- ☐ Residents can pursue hobbies or volunteer

Orientation and Support

- ☐ New residents are paired with a resident ambassador
- ☐ There's an orientation or welcome program for families
- ☐ Families are encouraged to participate in community life

Food and Dining

- ☐ Meals are healthy and customizable
- ☐ Residents can choose mealtimes or menus
- ☐ Guests can join meals easily

Safety and Environment

- ☐ Emergency and fall systems are in place
- ☐ Secure areas available for memory care
- ☐ Pets are welcome or allowed to visit

Financial Transparency

- ☐ Written list of all included and extra fees provided
- ☐ Clear policy for rate increases and refunds
- ☐ Staff can explain what happens if funds are depleted