

Transition to Nursing Home Care for Caregivers

Transitioning to a nursing home, professionally known as a Skilled Nursing Facility, can be an exhausting, emotionally challenging process. Your first few visits may be uncomfortable. Your loved one may be angry with you, or you may feel guilty. Allow yourself some bad days. You both will need time to adjust. Transitions are usually easier to manage when you know what to expect and how to help a loved one feel more at home.

What to Expect

As each day passes, your loved one and you will feel better about your care decision. Knowing what to expect can help you both through the first day, week and month. As you and your loved one prepare for the move, take some time to plan out the time after you leave the center on moving day. Maybe you'll want company. Maybe you'll want to know others can be available for a phone call. Be prepared for different options. You may want to ask family and friends to be available, just in case. If you invite family to your home and realize that you're not up to a visit, be honest and let them know.

The First Day

As with any move, the day your loved one moves will likely be hectic and exhausting. Care transitions are not only physically taxing; they also take a notable emotional toll. It's a tough day, but remember, there are brighter ones to come.

If you were providing in-home care, you may be at a loss as to what to do. It may feel odd to have time on your hands. You may feel like you're banging around an empty house. Have a few books ready to read on the first night. Relax with some music or turn on a movie that makes you laugh really hard or cry. When you can, sleep. And know that you're doing your best.

The First Week

The first week may be a bit confusing for both you and your loved one. You're getting used to a new routine, a new schedule, a new way. You may feel like you're navigating life without a map. Staff can help you adjust. If you're not sure whom to ask for help, ask to speak with a social worker. The Matulaitis Family Council, which meets the second Thursday of the month at 6:30pm in the facility, may be an excellent source of comfort and validation for you.

Your loved one may make negative comments. Your loved one may say he or she wants to go home. Acknowledge the desire. You might say, "I know, Mom. I wish you could too. What's hard for you today?" Then listen. If your loved one begins to cry, just offer comfort and a hug. After your loved one has had time to express feelings you also may want to redirect with a suggestion, such as "Let's take a walk down the hall" or "Let's get a cup of coffee."

The conversation about going home will tug on your heartstrings and nag your conscience. Just as you gave your loved one room for emotions during the decision to move, do so now. Empathize, offer comfort. Keep your feelings separate from your loved one's. Turn to family, friends, and others in your support system when you have your own tough moments.

If you struggle with how to address your loved one's comments, ask the social worker for help. In addition to the Family Council, you may also look into the Day Kimball Healthcare Caregivers Support Group or Alzheimer's Association resources (see below).

During the first week, you'll better understand the routines of the facility: what it's like during meals, shift change, and at different times during the day. You'll begin to recognize familiar faces. Write down any questions you may have and ask the unit manager to answer them for you. Sometimes big changes can precipitate a crisis in meaning. Feel free to reach out to the pastoral care department for support of your loved one.

During the first week, others close to you will hear news of your loved one's move. When they call to check in on you, you may feel obligated to explain your decision. You only have to share as much information as you'd like. You can simply say, "It was just getting too tough at home. This is an adjustment for both of us. We appreciate your support."

You may wonder if you're calling or visiting too much. Call and visit as often as you'd like. Use your gut as a guide. You also may be so tired that you find yourself too exhausted to visit as often as you'd like. Catch up on your rest and then visit. You can call to check on your loved one and ask others to increase their visits in the meantime. Visits will be more enjoyable after you recover from the stress of the decision and all that led to it.

Other Resources

The **Alzheimer's Association** has extensive resources for families and caregivers of those affected by dementias. Their 24/7 helpline can be accessed by calling 1-800-272-3900. Online resources <http://www.alz.org> are also valuable for many caregivers.

The **Day Kimball Healthcare Caregivers Support Group** meets the second Tuesday of the month at St. Mary's Parish Center in Putnam 1:30-2:30pm. Contact Kathy Demers, APRN of the Day Kimball Healthcare Geriatric Care Program for more information 860-377-6416.

The Connecticut **Long Term Care Ombudsman** can be reached by 1-866-388-1888 or 1-860-424-5200.

The **Family Council** at Matulaitis typically meets the second Thursday of the month at 6:30pm in the facility. Monitor signs at Center Court for specifics.

Adapted from Care Conversations, Transition to Care <http://careconversations.org/transition-care> accessed 17 December 2014.