

Telling a Person That They Need Long-Term Nursing Home Care - Care Consultation

More difficult than making a decision to move a person into a care facility is telling the person that the time has come for a move.

Factors that lead to nursing home placement can include:

- A caregiver can no longer adequately provide the necessary care the person with dementia needs.
- The person with dementia may live alone and can no longer take care of him or herself. (Neglecting personal care, exhibiting unsafe behaviors such as wandering or not taking medications properly.)

Planning ahead:

- Ideally, discussions with a person about nursing home placement and care preferences have taken place while the person is still able to understand and take an active part in decision-making.
- The more involved in the decision a person is, the more satisfied he or she will be with the results. If a move is done “to them”, they’ll feel powerless and will fight the relocation. If it is done “with them”, they have a sense of control and adjustment is possible.

Communicating the news:

- Even though you made decisions about nursing home care with the individual, he or she may have forgotten due to disease progression. If you think the person will understand, explain what is happening and why (i.e., all other care options have been exhausted; you need more care than I can provide to keep you healthy and safe, etc.)
- Consider the time of day and circumstances under which the person would accept the news best. Choose a time when the person is calm and without a lot of distractions.
- Consider having a doctor, a home health nurse or social worker tell the person that he or she needs more care than can be provided at home. The person may listen to a professional.

- When the time comes for the move, be honest and tell the person where they are going. Do not get the person in the car and say that you are “going for a ride” or “a visit” somewhere. Such dishonesty may lead the person to have problems with adjusting to the nursing home.
- The same is true if you tell the person they will be able to “go home when they get better”. The person will expect this to happen and not get involved with nursing home life, forming relationships and engaging in activities.

Reaction/adjustment to the news:

- Most likely the person with dementia will be upset by the news. There may be resistance, resentment, and the person may blame you for having to move. These reactions should not change your mind about the move. You are making the decision with the person’s interest, quality of care and life at heart.
- The person may feel rejected or abandoned. Address these issues. Be patient and reassure the person about their value, both as a person and as a member of the family. Reassure the person that you love him or her, and that you will visit.
- Help the person express and handle feelings about the move. Do not argue with what he or she may be feeling— it only puts the person more on the defense.
- If the person gets upset when you bring up the move, mention it only when necessary.

Before the move:

- Have the person choose personal belongings he or she would like to take to the new home.
- If practical, talk about other residents who will be at the facility (e.g. roommates, food staff, activities directors), as well as visiting schedules and privacy.
- If possible, address who the person’s doctors, nurses, aides and therapists will be and the medical routines they will be expected to follow.
- Acquaint yourself with the person’s healthcare providers. Allow them to get to know the person better by:
 - Providing photographs from the person’s life.
 - Sharing stories or memories about the person prior to his or her diagnosis.
 - Preparing a written personal history.
 - Explaining favorite hobbies, activities and interests
 - Relaying caregiver tips that worked for you.

After the move:

- Once the person has moved, try to visit often during the first few weeks to help the person feel secure. Keep visits relatively short and do not tire out the person.
- Allow time for your loved one to adjust to the new surroundings.
- If the person insists returning home with you, this may be his or her way to express anxiety or unhappiness. Give the person reassurance and affection.

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer research, care and support, is dedicated to finding prevention methods, treatments and an eventual cure for Alzheimer's.

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