**MOVING A PARENT TO ASSISTED LIVING
12 STRATEGIES TO EASE THE TRANSITION**
Moving a parent, even a willing one, into assisted living or any senior living facility is fraught with emotion. Your parents may mourn the loss of their younger years, their independence, the home they built. They could be scared about aging, making new friends, and finding their way in a new place. You may be mourning all of those things, too. You may second-guess your decision. Did we act too quickly? Overreact? Wait too long? And you will feel guilt. Guilt is inevitable.
All of these feelings are normal and don’t need to last forever. Keep these 12 strategies in mind as you make the transition:

1. **Give it time.** Senior living experts say it typically takes between three and six months for someone to adjust to assisted living. That’s an average. It might be quicker; it may take longer. Stay focused on the reasons you made the decision (safety, health, security, sanity). Keeping the big picture in mind will help you through the rough patches.
2. **Visit often, or not for two weeks.** Only you know your parent, so only you can decide how best to assist them through the early weeks of the move. Many experts will tell you to visit as often as possible. Frequent visits can ease any stress your parent may have that they will be abandoned or lonely. It might be easier for them to meet people at activities or in the dining room if they have a companion with them. But if your parent is calling you several times a day, staying in their room, and waiting for you to show up and keep them company, you may need to give them some space in order to encourage them to branch out. When I went to college my parents wouldn’t let me come home to visit for the first few weeks. By forcing me to stay at school on the weekends, they forced me to make friends. Tough love – it can work both ways.
3. **It takes a village.** Mobilize yours. When we first moved my mother into assisted living, my sisters and I could not visit for a week or two. We had been staying with her before the move and needed to get back to work. Plus, our father was in the hospital. So I called my relatives and asked them to visit in our absence. Just as parenting takes a village, so does daughtering.
4. **Expect setbacks.** Just when you think you are over the hump and your parent is settling in, things will change. They will tell you they are lonely. They will decide they don’t like their new dining hall friends. They will ask to go home. These moments are heart wrenching but knowing that they are normal and that they will pass, can help get you through them.
5. **Allow yourself to feel discomfort.** Speaking of home, know that when your parent says they want to go home, they may not necessarily mean their last address. It’s incredibly difficult to hear your parent say they want to go home. But know this: they may not be referring to their last address – especially if they have dementia; they may be referring to a childhood home. Home is both a place and a feeling. Sit with them in the discomfort of that statement and talk to them about what they miss. You can’t promise to change their situation, but you can hear them as they express their feelings. And that will help.
6. **Acknowledge the difficult parts.** Yes, you want to paint the new move in a positive light, but don’t talk at your parents about all the wonderful new activities and people and opportunities. Listen to their fears and concerns and acknowledge them. Then help them get through it. They will be more likely to listen to what you have to say if they feel like you’ve listened to what they had to say.
7. **Surround your parent with their personal belongings.** Moving to assisted living usually means downsizing. The dining room table with two extension leaves and coordinating hutch may not fit in the new apartment. But what does fit, are photographs of family and friends, photo albums, favorite books, a familiar piece of artwork. If you need to downsize the bedroom set, you can still bring a familiar blanket and pillows. The kitchen may be new, but you can pack your mother’s favorite teacup. Leaving a home shouldn’t mean leaving behind the comforts of that home.
8. **Limit new things.** You may be tempted to furnish your parent’s new place with the latest and greatest in hopes they love their fancy new home. But limit new items. Moving into an assisted living facility is a major adjustment where everything is new – the people, the food, the routines. Don’t overwhelm your parents with a new phone or remote control for the television, or a fancy new coffee maker. Limit the amount of new things they need to learn.
9. **Be your parent’s advocate.** No place is perfect. You and your parents may see opportunities to improve something at their new home but your parent may hesitate to speak up when they move to a new place. Do it for them. My father, who worked nights his entire adult life, likes to sit outside on a balcony until almost midnight. When he first moved in, the staff would tell him he needed to be inside by 8 p.m. I asked management if there was any reason he couldn’t be on the balcony after 8, and there wasn’t. The staff just wasn’t used to seeing the residents out of their rooms after 8:30 at night. So management let the staff know that my father could stay outside as late as he wanted– and he does.
10. **Build a team**. The staff at assisted living can and should be a part of your team. Talk to them about your concerns and your parent’s concerns and actively enroll them in helping with the transition. Don’t assume they will notice what needs to happen – they are very busy. If your parent tells you they are too shy to go to the dining hall for dinner, or they forget when activities are happening, ask if a staff member can knock on their door and invite them. If the staff members know what you need, they should be willing to help out.
11. **Set your boundaries.** Yes, you want to be a good daughter and ease your parent’s transition. But you have needs too. Try to free up as much times as you can in the first few months after the move to help, but know that it is okay if you are not always available. Your kids may need you. Your boss and clients may need you. And you need to take care of yourself. Determine what you are able and willing to do and then stick to your boundaries. Other people will tell you what you should do. Ignore them. You are the judge – no one else.

Daughter knows best. Remember the television show and saying, “Father Knows Best.” Well this time, daughter, you know best. Different experts may tell you to stay away or visit often. They may tell you to dismiss complaints as normal. But you know your parent best.
Trust your instincts.

I was told my father had to spend the rest of his life in a locked memory unit. When I expressed doubt about that decision, doctors and social workers dismissed me as a daughter in denial. But I persisted and my father now lives in his own apartment in an assisted living facility with minimal support.