

Aging in Place or Assisted Living?

Where do you want to live when you're retired - in your own home or in an assisted-living facility? Although the answer might seem obvious, that question is one that everybody should ask themselves, their spouse and their parents long before retirement occurs. As a caregiver, the answer to this question for your loved one will depend on several factors and every family will have to figure out for themselves what they feel is best; aging in place or relocating to a senior living community.

Helping a loved one make the decision (or making the decision for them) to age in place or move to a senior living community becomes more real as that loved one or parent becomes frail, begins to have falls, shows signs of memory impairment or dementia, has difficulty keeping up the house and yard, etc. This can be very difficult for caregivers, as most of our loved ones are attached to the familiarity and comfort of their surroundings and routines. Although most people would prefer to age in place in the familiarity and comfort of their home with family and friends nearby to help when needed, millions of older Americans now occupy "inappropriate residential environments" according to a study at the University of Florida. The home may not accommodate the now-needed wheelchair or walker. Safety features like grab bars, railings and adequate lighting for older eyes may not be present. When a loved one is living alone, age-related challenges like reduced vision, reduced mobility, dementia or chronic illness requiring special care can also jeopardize his or her safety. Another consideration is the neighborhood. Has your loved one's once-friendly neighborhood changed over the years? Does your loved one still know the neighbors? Are stores still convenient for shopping? Are the homes in the neighborhood increasing or decreasing in value?

If your loved one has decided to age in place, they need to consider what it will take to allow them to keep living in their home for many years. For example, will there always be someone to call in an emergency or if they need help with daily activities and simple tasks around the home, shopping or meal preparation? Will they become isolated and lonely if they can no longer drive? Can they purchase and prepare food for nutritious meals? Can they manage any medical procedures like injections, medications, wound care? Have the costs of in-home assistance and updates to the home been considered?

If you or your parents are okay with moving to a senior living community, think about what you or they may be leaving behind. Is there anything you can't live without but can't take with you? Are you or your parents leaving a neighborhood of friends for a building full of strangers? Will you or your parents miss the yard, garden, patio or special room in the house? Have you considered the cost to determine if you can afford to move to an assisted living community? While most of us might think we would never leave home, it's worth weighing the pros and cons. There are pluses and minuses to both aging in place and assisted living, and as the aging population increases, living options are increasing, too. There are more resources to allow a person to live longer in their own home, and many senior communities are more accommodating and nurturing than they were in the past.

When you're trying to figure out what's the best living option for a loved one, it's important to know what's available when it comes to aging in place or moving to a senior care community. The best option for your loved one will depend on the health, social and emotional needs your

loved one may have, and determining which arrangement will allow them to maintain a safe, well-rounded life in the residence of their choice. Talking to your loved one's doctor, considering the helpful resources your loved one has at home now, knowing the resources available in the community such as home delivered meals and transportation options, comparing costs of different living options and knowing what your loved one can afford will help you make the decision to age in place or relocate to a senior living community. The decision likely won't be an easy one, but the most important thing is to make sure you do what's right for your loved one. Consider your options carefully and make the best choice you can.

This year's Caregiver Journey presentations address this very issue. Please join us on the third Thursday of the month, July through September, from 1:00-3:00 pm at the Fairgrounds Pavilion in Cedarburg to hear experts from the community address topics related to aging in place vs. making the decision to move, as well as being prepared to making tough decisions related to other aspects of caregiving. Call the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) or check the Caregiver Connection website at <https://www.ozccc.org/newsevents> for more information. The ADRC can also provide information about community resources, financial assistance and living options in the county at 262-284-8120.