

Changing Homes

The emphasis today is to help older people maintain their independence for as long as possible in their own homes. However, at some point, it may be necessary to consider alternative living arrangements when the caregiver can no longer provide the amount of help needed. This is perhaps one of the most difficult stages in caregiving. Caregivers say they would rather no wrestle with the conflict between respecting a loved one's independence and feeling protective of them.

"I guess one of the things I said or I thought at the time was that my mother had never said to my brother or I that we could never come back home again. Somehow this emotional problem of saying to my mother that you can't come back home again, I can't look after you any longer, that was... excruciatingly painful because I know physically I couldn't care for her and she needed more care than I could give. But still it's a terrible dilemma to have to face."

(Quote from Caregiver)

Many people still have reservations about using care facilities. Retirement home and long-term care home have been stigmatized as places where you put someone to die. Some caregivers and people needing care admit that they think care homes are awful places, without ever having been in one. Visiting these homes and talking to the staff may ease any fears you have. Also, involving your loved one can help them to maintain a sense of control over the process.

The benefits of alternative living arrangements are often disregarded because the focus is on necessity. "We have to do this: is what caregivers say more often than "It would be good to do this." This is the risk if you wait until placement become urgent before starting to think and talk about it. Here are just a few benefits to think about earlier in the caregiving process.

The new experiences found in a different living arrangement may actually improve an individual's quality of life. Some caregivers have found that such a change stimulated their loved one's potential when the previous living situation was stifling their abilities. A retirement home or long-term care home may be safer for the person needing care. Early placement can also be easier on the care reviver, since change can be more difficult to accept when one is very ill. Dependency on you as caregiver will usually become stronger as time goes on. This can make separation or uprooting at a later time much more difficult.

If the person needing care resists the idea of alternative living arrangements, try to involve other family members, the health care team, a faith leader or some else the person trusts. . This may help your loved one see that you are not trying to get rid of them or "put them away' but are thinking of their health and well-being.