

After the Move: Adjustments for the Caregiver

Experiences and feelings about the move

Your experience is unique

The move is often very quick and you must adjust to a new place, people and routines. You will also be juggling many duties and responsibilities: adjusting to changes in your life, helping your family member/relative/friend adjust, taking care of others in your family, working with the staff, and much more.

Some of the things that many of you may go through will include:

- Stress and exhaustion
- Coping with a variety of feelings:
 - **Loss of control.** Feeling lost or feeling left out, you must now rely on others to provide the care and ensure the safety of your family member/relative/friend.
 - **Anger and resentment.** At yourself for not doing more or having to be responsible for decisions; at other family members for not being involved; at staff for not providing the care the way you think it should be done.
 - **Guilt.** For breaking promises about never moving your family member/relative/friend into a Home, not being able to provide care at home longer even though everything that could be done has been done.
 - **Grief.** Loss of relationship, loss of the person you used to know, loss of a future you expected or hoped for, loss of companionship, support.

Not all caring relationships are loving ones; even as caregiver, you may be harboring old resentments, unresolved issues, or maybe you just did not get along.

It does not make the adjustment to the move or to all the changes any easier; it may even make them harder.

You may also be feeling less stressed, less tired as you get more sleep, more freedom and relief and you may be more relaxed.

Adjusting to a new role

Your role as caregiver does not end with the move. It evolves with it being different in some respects and you may not be sure where you fit in or what you should or should not do. Take time to grow into the changes. It takes time for the staff to get to know you and your family member/relative/friend. It will take time to “feel at home” and to be comfortable.

Each family member/relative/friend is different in terms of level of involvement, in terms of the relationship you have shared over the years, in terms of your capabilities, in terms of what you feel you can and cannot do. You must try to accept this and make it work regardless.

Tips to help you adjust

- **Remain positive.** Humor is a helpful coping mechanism.
- **Give a structure** to your day.
- **Have compassion for yourself.** Acknowledge your feelings.
- **Explore ways to re-invest your time and energy.** Let your energy levels rise again and rest when you need to rest.
- **Reconnect** with friends.
- **Restart** old interests and/or try new ones.

- **Talk to somebody** who has made the transition you have trouble adjusting.
- **Get to know the Home and its staff.** Establish a primary contact at the Home; learn about the day to day routines, the different areas of the Home, the programs and services available.
- **Maintain realistic expectations** of the Home and staff.
- **Volunteer** at the Home: meal times, resident activities, etc.
- **Help staff** with small tasks.
- **Attend** meetings, care conferences, etc.
- **Become a member** of the family council or a support group.
- **Read information package** provided by the Home as an ongoing resource;
- **Share with other family members.** How did they cope?

New role as “Partner in Care”

You are building a new life for yourself, and your changing role is a part of that. You are now a valuable member of the caregiving team: you must work with long term care staff to inform, advise, recommend and make decisions. You are now involved in planning the care for your family member/relative/friend and it is important that you share information about his or her needs and the approaches which can facilitate the provision of care.

Conclusion

Initially, everything is strange and you may not feel comfortable, but things should become easier and easier as you get to know the staff and become increasingly familiar with the Home, the routines and your new life.

Resources

Caring Partnerships Help Sheet, Alzheimer’s Australia

Letting Go Without Giving Up, Alzheimer Scotland

Understanding the Experience of Moving a Loved One to a Long term Care Facility: Family Members’ Perspectives, Reuss, Dupuis & Whitfield, Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 2005.

Further information on this topic

- Family Caregiver Alliance
www.caregiver.org
- American Health Care Association
www.aha.org
- *When Home is no Longer an Option*
www.alzheimerniagara.ca/resources
- *From Home to Retirement Home*
www.rgpeo.com/media/3926/rrr_guide_sept09_3b1.pdf

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