

FOR FAMILIES

Assisting a loved one with a retirement community decision can be challenging for everyone involved. *The Gardens of Peterborough* understands that. Through the years we've helped thousands of people with this important decision. We know that "change" can be difficult and can be stressful. We also know that this change is for the better: healthier, more energized and interactive older adults, and *closer, more relaxed and loving families.*

Picture your mother or father eating well and regularly interacting with others, with greater mobility and independence because of the exercise and balance classes he or she has been attending. Picture your relationship returning to one of parent and child instead of caregiver and "patient". Imagine smiling visits with grandchildren, perhaps over a special birthday dinner.

Keeping Families Together

At *The Gardens*, our commitment is to keep families together. A monthly newsletter and calendar of events keeps residents and their families up to date on all that is going on. Families are encouraged to participate in any of our activities or Special Events. Whether for a special Mother's Day tea with visiting entertainment or for a simple group stroll along the river, *families are always invited to be a part of our communities.* We specifically plan for events to bring you closer together. Join us on outings and adventures. Share a delicious meal together in our lovely dining rooms whenever you wish, and chat over coffee or tea and delectable desserts. We have a special guest suite to make regular family visits convenient and simple for those who are from out of town. Indoor or covered parking is available for your convenience as well.

Choose to host your own family "Special Events" at *The Gardens*. Entertain in one of our private dining areas. Let our friendly and capable staff serve you and give you relaxed "quality" time to spend together as a family. Grandchildren are especially welcome.

Caring Together

As part of our total philosophy of "Care", when approved by our residents we involve families in our multi-disciplinary Care plan. We involve families as much as they wish in move-in transition plans and in ongoing updates and "care conferences" with our staff. We keep you up-to-date on your parent's health, diet, and social status and we inform you immediately if there are changes you should know about. At *The Gardens of Peterborough*, we work with families to maximize the health and independence of each one of our residents.

REACHING A DECISION

For older adults and their families, the time to consider a move to a retirement community often arises when emerging needs can no longer be satisfied in the current situation. Sometimes it is precipitated by a crisis, and sometimes by slowly progressing challenges that have reached a threshold. That threshold could be on the part of the older adult, the caregiver, or both.

Increasing Risk, Growing Stress

Mother may have had a severe fall and be undiscovered for a period of time. She may be phoning frequently, in need of company. She may not be following her medication regimen as she should. Father may be self neglecting, not eating well and losing weight. Daughter may be experiencing symptoms of stress, such as back problems or hypertension, as she works full time and tries to support a home and family while regularly caring for the needs of a parent. Son may feel his work colleagues are becoming less patient and understanding if he has to leave work early to attend to too

many crises. Multiple demands and responsibilities lead to conflicting, sometimes overwhelming feelings of frustration and guilt that often accompany being a caregiver to a parent or other loved one.

Each Situation is Unique

Some older adults take pride in initiating the topic of moving to a retirement community in order to simplify life and, perhaps, to have assistance available if needed. They may make arrangements for moving to their new home themselves, before talking with their families or their doctor. They may feel more independent and believe they will have increased choices if they take control of the move on their own.

However, an older adult who initiates a move to a retirement community on their own is less common than those who deny or are unaware of their needs for support and assistance. They may also have unrealistic expectations of their family as care providers. Conversations with these older adults are more challenging. "I'm taking care of myself," they may say. "I'm doing fine. Why would I want to move?"

Consider the Rewards

Retirement communities, particularly those that offer assisted living features, can successfully address changing needs and improve the quality of life for both an older adult and their children and families. But the idea often, and understandably, meets with resistance. How can families encourage their loved ones to consider moving into a facility that more adequately meets their needs? How can they encourage that first visit to explore a new lifestyle and environment?

Understanding and empathizing with the older person's point of view is a valuable starting place. Many will express similar concerns:

- fear of loss of independence, control, and choice;
- loss of familiar and valued home, possessions, and friends;
- fear of outspending financial resources; and
- loss of respect of self and others if help outside the family is accepted.

Challenging and "reframing" the perception of independence versus dependence may soften pride issues and fears regarding loss of control. "Wouldn't it be great to have help with meals, laundry, and housekeeping?" might be a place to start. Discuss how everyone is interdependent and needs the help of others, in varying degrees, throughout life. Talk about how accepting some help with areas of vulnerability, like bathing, can actually protect and enhance independence and maximize function and choice. Help explore the older person's strengths and ways not only to maintain current abilities and interests, but also to develop new skills and interests as well.

Another approach is to emphasize the rewards of reestablishing family relationships in more appropriate ways. "Wouldn't you like me to go back to being your daughter and not your caretaker?" may be a helpful way to introduce the topic. Explain that when paid staff are taking care of meal preparation, housekeeping, laundry, bathing, and medications, parent and child can meet more as equals - and with time for real connection. It may help to reinforce the idea that the quality of the relationship as a whole may improve when worry and stress are reduced. When an adult child can give time and attention to their parent by choice, the quality of the relationship often improves.

Even when needs are perhaps quite obvious to the family, encouraging a move to the retirement community of choice may still seem like too big of a step right away. Suggesting that the parent try the new home for a trial visit and then reevaluate before making a final decision can often provide reassurance about quality of life, staff and services, and the possibility of new friends and experiences.

Addressing Feelings of Guilt

Sometimes the resistance is as pronounced in care-giving family members as it is in the older adults themselves. Beliefs such as "we should always take care of our own" may create feelings of guilt and stress *on the part of families*, which may lead to avoidance and denial. Such feelings are frequent. Again, "reframing" is often a useful strategy. You may be able to be a more attentive, loving daughter or son when your role is more clearly defined and your responsibilities more within your means. The care of staff at a qualified retirement community can give you the time and energy to be a family again. Improved nutrition, health, and social interaction on the part of the older adult are the rewards.

A New Chapter

In the end, families are often surprised by the **ease of transition** to a retirement community. The parent may have been anxious about the changes, but when they realize they are in a safe, interesting place with kind and responsive people, with frequent contact with family, they begin a positive life chapter.

If you need more information than is available here or wish to discuss individual circumstances, please feel free to Contact Us for more information and assistance, or call 1-877-742-9779.