

choosing a residential placement and its emotional impact

When the difficult decision is to be made for the person you are looking after to go into a residential aged care facility, the task of finding the right one is time consuming. However, do remember that there may be no such place as an 'ideal' aged care facility and you may have to settle for a combination of the factors that are most important to you. Listed below is a series of frequently asked questions that may assist you to make a decision.

Q. Where can I obtain information about moving into a residential aged care facility?

You should always start with the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) who will conduct an assessment and complete an Aged Care Application and Approval form indicating the type and level of care required. They can also provide you with a list of residential aged care facilities and the general information you require.

Further information relating to aged care facilities and charges can be obtained from the following services:

- ✓ ***Commonwealth Carelink Centre - 1800 052 222 (Free call)***
- ✓ ***Aged and Community Care Information Line – 1800 500 853 (Free call)***

Q. Where do I start?

When provided with a list of possible aged care facilities, making a visit to them is a good place to start prior to making your decision. On the following page is a checklist of questions prepared by DPS Publishing that might assist you to look at the options open to you.

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Q. What questions should I ask the staff when visiting these centres?

What were your very first impressions?	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Average <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>
Are people welcoming and friendly?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are your questions received positively?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do staff appear to treat residents and their visitors with respect?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there a good activity program?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does it smell good?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the temperature comfortable?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the lighting and ventilation good?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there secure and interesting outdoor areas?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there areas for families to get together?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Did you receive good written information?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there a residents or relatives committee?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Would you live in this facility?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do they have dementia specific facilities?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Q. What level of accreditation has the facility achieved?

If the aged care facility has three years of accreditation, this means the facility has achieved commendable ratings and provides excellent standards of service. If accreditation has been given for one year, then find out the reason why and what they are doing to change the situation. Information relating to the facility's accreditation and a copy of the assessor's report can be obtained from:

Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency

☎ 02 9633 2099 or 1800 288 025

Fax: 02 9633 2344

Website: www.accreditation.org.au

Q. What services cost extra?

- ✓ *Is Physiotherapy or rehabilitation services included and how much of it is available?*
- ✓ *What podiatry, hairdressing, clothes washing etc are provided?*

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Q. What are the meals like?

- ✓ *Are special dietary needs catered for?*
- ✓ *Are the meals varied and of good quality?*
- ✓ *Are the helpings and frequency of meals sufficient for your loved one?*
- ✓ *Are cultural dietary needs catered for?*

Q. What is the ratio of staff to residents?

- ✓ *Does this vary at different times, particularly at weekends?*
- ✓ *How many trained nurses are there, as opposed to care assistants? (There is no specific ratio of staff to residents as care needs can vary greatly in different aged care facilities)*

Q. How many staff are permanent?

- ✓ *Employing a large proportion of temporary agency staff keeps worker's compensation down, but this means that there could be no-one on duty who is familiar with your loved one and their needs*

Q. If there are any excursions, are they varied?

- ✓ *Do they cater for those who are in a wheelchair or who have other difficulties with mobility?*

Q. What is the aged care facility's attitude to outside medical visits?

- ✓ *As they are only required to 'facilitate these', sometimes this can amount to no more than your relative being sent alone in a taxi. Whether they are competent to manage on their own at the other end is something you may need to address.*

Q. How much choice is available to residents in their daily activities?

- ✓ *Some facilities make a practice of bedding down residents at an early hour to ensure minimum staff is required for resident care during the night.*

Q. What is the facility's attitude to regular visitors and do they have a visiting policy?

- ✓ *In some people's experience, constant visitors are regarded as witnesses and some facilities do not like them*
- ✓ *Is there a place where you can talk in private with your loved one?*

Q. Is your loved one's religious or cultural needs respected and acknowledged?

- ✓ *Some facilities are fully or partially dedicated to a certain religious group or ethnic culture*
- ✓ *Are the home's documentations in plain English or available in the language you need, specifically the Agreement that you sign?*
- ✓ *Are interpreter services accessible if needed?*

Q. Does the facility have a complaint procedure?

- ✓ *If this procedure is not effective or have good outcomes for your loved one, you may contact **TARS The Aged Care Rights Service** on **02 9281 3600***

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or **1800 424 079** (outside Metro area). They can provide advice in relation to resident's rights or advocate on their behalf.

COPING WITH RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT:

The time when the person you've been looking after goes into residential care is difficult for many carers of all ages, whether a spouse, child or parent of the person going into care. The following information is designed to help you sort through your feelings and decide how you want your life to be in the future.

Q. What are the many emotions experienced by carers when their relative enters a residential care facility?

Carers can feel any or all of the following feelings at this time:

- ✓ *Guilt*
- ✓ *Grief and loss*
- ✓ *Anger*
- ✓ *Vulnerability*
- ✓ *Helplessness*
- ✓ *Loss of identity*
- ✓ *Fear*
- ✓ *Stress*
- ✓ *Relief*
- ✓ *Emptiness, or*
- ✓ *Like you have 'failed' your relative*

Many carers are surprised by how up and down their feelings are after their relative goes into residential care.

All these reactions are completely normal and many carers feel the same way.

Many carers feel a great sense of grief at the loss of the companionship of their relative and also, initially, at the loss of the routine they once had. You may also feel as though you are no longer useful or valued in your caring role.

GUILT

Guilt usually arises from not meeting our own expectations. Perhaps we thought that we would never need to place our relative into residential care, however continuing to care for a relative at home forever just might not be possible. We often do not know just how draining caring can be when we make such commitments and over time we may become exhausted, isolated and perhaps unwell. Caring can sometimes be just too much because not enough help was available from other family members or community services. It then becomes obvious that we can't 'do it all'.

A decision to place a relative in residential care usually arises out of necessity.

This is *not* selfish. Your own physical and mental health needs are important and you cannot neglect these indefinitely. If you can accept your own limits without judging yourself harshly, you may find that your sense of guilt is reduced.

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Guilt can also be tied up with the need to blame others for your relative having to move into residential care. Often we may be angry at other family members for not being supportive. The guilt we feel may be experienced as crying, fear, sadness and other emotions.

Guilt and grief are normal reactions to loss or change in the caring situation as it was. Working through these emotions, perhaps with the help of other people, is part of moving into the future. For many, letting go of the past is difficult and many people don't want to. This implies letting go of both the good and bad memories.

Q. What about how my relative feels?

Sometimes carers feel that they want to take away the emotional pain of their relative. It is important to allow them to work through their own emotions so they can keep a sense of independence and dignity. Sorting through their own feelings is part of their process of adjustment. You cannot do this for them.

Q. How will my relative cope with the move?

Changing your place of residence is a stressful experience for anyone and takes time for adjustment. For some, this may mean weeks and for others months or even longer. During this time of adjustment, the person is likely to feel unhappy and/or disorientated, especially if the person has dementia. During this period of adjustment, the person will need reassurance that it will get better and they may need some help in adjusting to life in their new residence. Try not to be disheartened during this time, for most people the adjustment period is usually the most difficult for you to deal with.

Q. How often should I visit or see my relative?

There are no rules about how often you need to see or visit your relative. Whatever works best for you and them is probably a good solution. Frequency of visits may depend on many things, like; how far away they are, your energy levels, whether or not you have transport, how often you like to see them, how often they would like to see you, and so on. Talk to your relative and the staff at the aged care facility. Ultimately, only you can decide what you will be most comfortable with.

Q. What can I do when my relative says that they want to go home?

If you have placed your relative in full-time care because you could no longer manage at home, it is probably unlikely that you would be able to care for them at home again.

Many carers feel guilty when their relative says 'I want to go home'. This is quite common among carers, but think back to the reasons why your relative went into the aged care facility and why they still need to remain there.

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When your relative tells you they want to 'go home' respond to their emotional need in an understanding way. They still need to feel that they are loved and wanted.

Q. Am I still a carer after my relative has entered care?

The answer to this question is very definitely YES. Just because you are not doing the majority of the hands-on caring, doesn't mean that you've lost your right to be involved in your relative's care. Many carers still play an active role in caring through regular visits, washing, food preparation or, maybe where possible, through regular visits back home or family outings. Liaising with residential care staff, planning and review meetings are other important tasks that carers continue to perform.

TIP

If you are receiving the Carer Payment or Carer Allowance, you need to inform Centrelink that your relative has entered care.

Your Carer Payment will continue for seven pay periods (14 weeks) after your relative enters care.

Your Carer Allowance ceases on the day they enter care.

Q. How do I cope with the changes?

Attend to your emotions

It is very helpful to identify your feelings and acknowledge them. In other words, if you are sad and want to cry, do so; if you are lonely and want to be around people, contact supportive family and friends; if you want or need to talk about how you feel ring the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636**. The Centre operates Monday to Friday, 9 am - 5 pm. If it is in the evening, overnight or over the weekend, contact **Salvo Care Line** on **1300 363 622** or **Lifeline** on **13 11 14**.

However you feel, is OK. It's just a natural reaction to what is happening.

Continue to attend your carer support group

If you have been attending a carer support group, continue to do so as you are likely to have many friends and contacts there. Just because your relative has entered residential care doesn't mean you have to stop going.

Think about how you would like your life to be now

Such a major change in your life requires some thought. You might like to think about the following questions:

- ✓ *How often am I able to visit my relative?*
- ✓ *What aspects of their care do I want to continue to be involved in?*
- ✓ *how much free time do I have?*
- ✓ *Are there any hobbies or interests I would like to take up again or new ones I haven't tried before?*

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✓ *How will I have a social life?*

This is a great opportunity to make some choices about the direction you will go from here. Once you have made your decisions, go on to the next step.

Set up a new routine for yourself.

Determine which days and times you will visit your relative (although be wary not to wear yourself out by overdoing this). You may also need to consider practical issues like how you will get to and from the home and whether anyone will accompany you. During visits to your relative you will meet other carers and this can be very rewarding.

Contact groups and people who you want to see regularly. Take up courses. Join a walking group or whatever you desire so that you have an enjoyable life.

Remember, balance between caring work, your own needs and a social life is important.

Q. Who can I turn to if I have concerns about the quality of the care provided?

If you feel that your relative is not being cared for properly, in the first instance it is a good idea to talk to the staff of the aged care facility. Sometimes they are not aware that there is a problem. By talking to them, this gives them the opportunity to rectify the situation. If you have done this and nothing has changed, you can take your concerns to the person in charge of the facility.

If, after this, you still feel that the situation has not been remedied, there are a number of bodies that you can contact:

NSW Ombudsman

☎ **(02) 9286 1000** in Sydney or **1800 451 524** (outside Sydney metro).

The Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme

This service provides advocacy to anyone wishing to make a complaint about a Commonwealth funded aged care service

☎ **1800 550 552 (Free call)**

Remember: You did your best in caring for your relative. You are only human and caring is often more than a one person job. It's OK for you to say "I can't do it on my own any more". It's OK for you to look after your own mental and physical health.

TIP

If you want or need someone to talk to about how you're feeling, call the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636**. We can provide telephone counselling or information on face-to-face counselling services if required.

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REFERENCES:

Picking Up the Threads: Carers NSW, 1999. / It's Time for a Nursing Home: The Outstretched Hand Foundation. / DPS Publishing
DPS Guide to Aged Care NSW, 2004

Information contained in this fact sheet was supplied by the relevant authorities and is believed to be accurate at the time of publication. Whilst every care has been taken in its preparation, this fact sheet contains only guidelines in relation to its subject matter.

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