

## SELECTING THE PERFECT RETIREMENT RESIDENCE FOR YOUR PARENT(S)

Moving from the home you have lived in for decades is viewed by many elderly adults as a fate to be avoided at all costs. And moving into a community living environment ... not a chance! But the time may come when you feel that your parent(s) would be safer, more comfortable and better able to continue social activities in a retirement residence. The transition won't be easy under any circumstances but here are 10 tips that will help you, and them, ease the stress and pain.

### **TIP #1 – Start exploring options before the situation becomes urgent.**

If you wait for a crisis to happen before you start considering the options available, you will deprive you and your parent(s) of the opportunity to make an informed, well thought out decision about which residence would suit them best. Watch for signs that staying in the home is becoming a burden, or that driving limitations are preventing them from enjoying their normal social activities. Then start your investigation of the options. As an interim step you may want to arrange for some home care support, such as Meals on Wheels, or light housekeeping help.

### **TIP #2 – Watch your language!**

Words can create powerful images. If you use terms like “nursing home”, or even “the home”, your parent(s) may be visualizing an environment that is more like a hospital. Be sensitive to this as soon as you start talking with your parent(s). Be sure to use terms that they will view positively.

### **TIP #3 – Compile the “musts and wants” list.**

If you are taking these steps early, and there is no pressure to move imminently, you can probably have a non-threatening conversation with your parent(s) about what would be most important to them if they were going to a retirement residence. Look for their desires and concerns about location, the size of their suite, meal arrangements, religious affiliations and activities. Be sure to listen, and don't be judgemental.

### **TIP #4 – Do the financial analysis.**

Prices for retirement residence accommodations range from \$1,500 to over \$6,000 per month. Talk with your parent(s) to set an amount that will be affordable. Be sure to consider the cash they have today, as well as the proceeds of the sale of a house if appropriate. Many people who are in their 70s, 80s or nineties have pinched pennies all their lives, and they don't really understand how far their current financial resources will take them. Work with your parent(s) on this so they won't be burdened by unnecessary financial worries.

### **TIP #5 – Pre-select some residences for a closer look.**

There are literally hundreds of retirement residences in Ontario, and you won't want to be going through them all. You can get a snapshot of individual homes from “The Care Guide” or “A Comprehensive Guide to Retirement Living in Ontario”. Both these publications also have online access to information ([www.thecareguide.com](http://www.thecareguide.com) and [www.senioropolis.com](http://www.senioropolis.com)). Using the “musts and wants” list, and your financial budget as guidance, select 5 or 6 residences that best fit your criteria.



### **TIP #6 – Visit the residences for a tour.**

On your first visit you may want to go on your own to decide if it is worth bringing your parent(s) to check it out. The guides mentioned above have contact information for each residence. Most are happy to set up an appointment with you to take a tour, and often to enjoy a complimentary meal. Take your time on each visit. You want to get a good feel for the environment. You will also want to be clear about what services (medical, housekeeping, etc.) and activities (social events, outings, etc.) are included or not included in their fee structure. Even if your parent(s) don't need any of the "fee" services now, be clear on what they are since you may need to use them at a later time. Talk with the administrator, staff members and residents. Don't be shy about asking any question that occurs to you, and take lots of notes so that you will be able to sort through comparing later.

### **TIP #7 – Take your parent(s) on a tour.**

Select the 3 residences that fit the criteria best and plan for a second visit with your parent(s). Don't try to do all of them in one day. Consider that the visit will probably be more physically and emotionally tiring for them than it was for you. Take your time, and allow them to ask any questions, or voice any concerns that they have. Be sure that your parent(s) have the opportunity to talk with other residents.

### **TIP #8 – Consider a trial or short-term stay.**

Most residences have rooms where someone can come in and stay for a couple of days, or more. This can make very good sense if a parent is recovering from an illness. Or you can position it as a mini vacation from the drudgery of cooking their own meals and taking care of their own home. Encourage them to participate in the activities, and to meet and talk with the residents. They will get a much better feel for the day-to-day living environment. If a trial stay isn't possible, ask if the residence is having any events or activities that guests from the community can attend. Many have fairs, concerts or parties that are open to the public.

### **TIP #9 – Let your interest be known.**

Many retirement residences don't have waiting lists. However, if your parent(s) seem most comfortable in a room that has limited availability, be sure to let the administrators know so that you will get a call when one comes open. You don't have to move after the first call.

#### **When I needed help...**

“ I had a demanding professional career and responsibilities of my own. Suddenly I had to relocate my father to a retirement residence. Then a close friend passed away and I had to fulfill my responsibilities as the Estate Executor. I was shocked by all the “stuff” I had to do and how much time it took. The details seemed endless. To say I was overwhelmed is an understatement. I realized that many other professionals face the same challenges. So with the skills I developed in my corporate career I started Trusted Transitions. We help others through difficult times, taking the burden off their shoulders. ”

*Elaine Frost, president and founder of Trusted Transitions*



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