



How to Choose an Assisted Living Community

Assisted living can be the step between staying at home and skilled nursing care, and it may also be the appropriate long-term care option for seniors.

The Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA) at www.alfa.org has a wealth of material to help you in choosing an assisted living community. The ALFA philosophy of assisted living care is based on 10 principles that make assisted living residents the top priority:

- Offer cost-effective quality care, personalized for the individual's needs.
- Foster independence for each resident.
- Treat each resident with dignity and respect.
- Promote the individuality of each resident.
- Allow each resident choice of care and lifestyle.
- Protect each resident's right to privacy.
- Nurture the spirit of each resident.
- Involve family and friends in care planning and implementation.
- Provide a safe residential environment.
- Make the assisted living program a valuable community asset.

Questions to Ask About Assisted Living

- As you enter, is the lobby pleasing, the décor homelike?
- Does the administrator/staff greet the residents by name?
- Do the residents interact with each other and seem happy?
- Is the community designed for the residents' needs?
- Are doorways and hallways wide enough for wheelchairs?
- Are elevators available for those who cannot use stairs?
- Are handrails available to aid walking?

- Are cupboards and shelves easy to reach?
- Are the floors of a non-skid material?
- Are the carpets firm to aid walking?
- Are the common areas and residences free of odors and clean in appearance?
- Is there a fire sprinkler system?
- Are the exits clearly marked?
- Is the contractual agreement available?
- Is there a written care plan for each resident?
- Under what circumstances can the contract be terminated?
- Are there additional services available if a resident's needs change?
- Are there different costs for varying levels of services?
- Do the billing, payment and credit policies seem reasonable?
- Is staff available to meet scheduled and unscheduled needs?
- Is staff available 24/7 for assistance with daily activities?
- What medical services are provided?

Assisted living is usually about two-thirds the cost of skilled care and must be paid out-of-pocket, with a few states providing Medicaid waivers for assisted living services.

Be sure to ask about billing, bed reservations, refunds and payments. Take into account your personal resources, and the amount of time your loved one may be in the assisted living community.

Resource: Assisted Living Federation of America.

