

## Visiting in the Assisted Living or Skilled Care Facility

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Visiting your care receiver in a skilled care facility or in an assisted living setting can be uncomfortable – how do you act, what do you do, how do you respond to questions and issues? If you are not accustomed to being in these types of settings everything that is going on around you can be distracting and even confusing. If your care receiver suffers from dementia or confusion or is not at all happy about being where they are, this also can add to the stress of visits. Unfortunately one of the most tempting responses is to just not go or to cut down on visits. But there are some things that you can do to help make the visit better for you and for your care receiver.

Moving to assisted living or a skilled care facility is a major life change – new room, new surroundings, new people and new food. Depending on the setting much of their familiar furniture and belongings may not be able to be moved to the new setting with them. No wonder they might be cranky or depressed. Keeping their perspective and feelings in mind may be helpful to you as you visit.

One idea is to establish a somewhat regular schedule for your visits – a set routine can provide a sense of continuity for your care receiver and they can look forward to your visits. That said, it is also a VERY good idea to make visits occasionally on different days and at different times of day. This allows you to see how the facility operates and is staffed in various situations. If your care receiver suffers from confusion and dementia and doesn't remember recent or upcoming visits, don't let that keep you from visiting. Your presence lets your care receiver know they are important AND it helps staff see how important they are to family and friends outside the nursing home.

Another good idea is to bring something to do – an idea to discuss (maybe something interesting that you have recently read or a short meditation or poem or story that you can read and then you two can discuss or maybe some old family photos to talk about) or a project of some sort (jigsaw puzzle with LARGE pieces, lotion for hand or foot massages, album to organize photos, etc.). Humor is also a good idea – maybe one of those books of funny photos of animals, or humorous poetry that you can read. Sharing funny stories and recalling funny incidents from the past are other sources of humor.

Be respectful and sensitive. Someone in a skilled care facility may be feeling too ill on some days to interact for long with visitors. We all have good and bad days so be understanding when your care receiver is having a bad one! Being in a skilled care facility or assisted living also brings with it a range of feelings about loss of independence, loss of privacy, etc. This can intensify any mood swings. Treating your care receiver with respect is important in any situation. Try to avoid talking down to them, making decisions for them that they should be still able to make or treating them like a child.

And an important part of every visit to assisted living and skilled care facilities is paying attention to the care they are receiving. While you are there you can observe the level of staffing and how the staff interacts with residents. If your care receiver has complaints or you have concerns address them with the management. You might also find an ombudsman who works in the facility as an advocate for the residents.

Here are some particular points you might consider when you visit:

- Are the residents active and are a variety of activities available?
- Does the number of staff seem adequate given the number of residents?

- Is the facility clean and well maintained?
- Are the common areas safe and pleasant?
- Can residents personalize a room to some degree with personal belongings such as some items of furniture, photos, mementos, etc.?
- If there is a roommate does your care receiver seem to get along with the roommate? If not, is it possible to make a change to reduce some stress for both your care receiver and the roommate?
- Do you know and understand what has been prescribed in the way of medication , diet, exercise, etc. – and how the prescriptions are being carried out day to day?

If you see something that causes you concern, or your care receiver mentions something that causes concern, don't hesitate to raise the issue or concern with the management. If the facility offers meetings for family members, do make an effort to attend and get to know other caregivers as well as facility staff members.

Visits are not always easy, but they are important. Putting some thought and planning into the experience can make a big difference in how enjoyable they are.

**For information about home-delivered meals, help with transportation;  
and caregiver services, call  
Meals-on-Wheels of Johnson and Ellis Counties  
(817) 558-2840, (972) 351-9943,  
or email [info@mowjec.org](mailto:info@mowjec.org)**