

Senior Housing Talk

What to Expect When Talking to Loved Ones About Senior Housing

By [Nell Bernstein](#), *Caring.com* senior editor

You sit down with a handful of colorful brochures and a burst of optimism to have "the housing talk" with a relative or the person you're caring for -- to help her sort through all the options as she gets older and her needs change. But instead of thanks you get emotions: an angry outburst, maybe even tears, and the accusation that you're trying to "put" her somewhere.

Of course you have to talk to her about her options. But being prepared for the psychological roadblocks you're likely to hit when you broach the subject will help make that conversation more productive, and maybe even pleasant.

[David Solie](#), author of *How to Say It to Seniors: Closing the Communication Gap With Our Elders*, put it this way in an interview with *Caring.com*: "You have to understand exactly what you're asking of older people when you ask them to move. You're asking them to give up the equivalent of water or oxygen."

Understand That an Older Adult's Home Represents Control

You're asking the person to let *go* of control at a time when age itself may be making her feel she's losing control over so much else -- fundamentals like mobility, vision, hearing, their very ability to navigate the world.

Look at Housing From Her Point of View

Try visiting a senior living [community](#) that you'd consider for this person. Imagine you're an older adult on her way in the door with no ticket out. What may appear to be a beautifully run community -- if you don't have to live there -- could look to her like the end of the road.

Be Tactful and Gentle

As the person in your care ages, preparing her for the possibility of living in a nursing home could help make her comfortable with the idea. But don't be too surprised if the glossy retirement-home brochures don't get more than a quick once-over, especially at first. Where you see safety, nutritious meals, medical supervision, and a calendar full of fun activities, she may see loss of control, a building full of strangers, and the end of all that's familiar.

Remind Yourself That She May Come Around to the Idea

Attitudes change, and the most resistant older adults sometimes wind up as the happiest retirement community residents if they eventually realize they need help. But if she doesn't wind up moving when you think she should, you can still support her by making her housing situation as safe and comfortable as possible.

Remember the Bottom Line

Keep in mind that in the end, it's her decision, not yours -- and communicate that thought to her. As long as she's mentally competent, acknowledging that she's in charge of her own life will make the process of helping her navigate the housing maze a more positive and productive one for all involved.