



Long-Term Care: An Emotional Journey for Family Members



Office of the State Long-Term Care

OMBUDSMAN

Established within the Iowa Department on Aging
515.725.3333 | 866.236.1430 | www.iowaaging.gov

Many times, moving a loved one into a long-term care facility is a true act of love and unselfishness. When a person is no longer safe living at home, or when a caregiver can no longer provide the care an individual needs, a long-term care facility may be the best solution.

But moving a loved one into a facility can often be a very emotional decision for a family. There is no right or wrong way to feel; each person is unique and every situation is unlike any other.

This fact sheet is designed to discuss some of the common emotions a caregiver may experience when moving a loved one into long-term care and provide some suggestions for dealing with those feelings.

Additional support is available by contacting the Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program at 800.532.3213 or the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman at 866.236.1430.

ANXIETY

What should I expect? What if my loved one is not happy there? What do I do if I need help or advice?

- You will be faced with a lot of paperwork the first day. Don't be afraid to ask to have each document explained to you. If you are feeling overwhelmed, ask to take the paperwork home to read it through.
- Visit the facility at unexpected times to get a clear picture of the residents' routine. You will be able to identify when something is out of the ordinary.
- Get to know the staff. It's normal to ask a lot of questions about procedures and routines.
- If the facility does not seem to be a good fit for your family member, you may want to consider moving to another facility. While moving is hard, finding the right fit can make the difference between continual anxiety and a happy, successful living environment.
- If you need help or advice about long-term care facilities, contact the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman to discuss the situation and/or request assistance resolving an issue.

ANGER / RESENTMENT

Why should we have to spend so much money for long-term care? Why can't the facility do things for my loved one the way I did them at home? Why won't anyone address my concerns and complaints about my loved one's care?

- Talk to the facility's social worker about available payment programs, like long-term care insurance, veterans benefits, Medicaid and how to qualify. Medicaid can pay for the nursing facility when someone is unable to pay. The VA may be able to provide financial assistance to veterans and dependents who qualify.
- Talk with the director of nursing about routines you had at home and provide feedback about what is or is not working. Staff can only fix an issue if they are aware of the problem. If you are not satisfied with the facility's efforts to resolve an issue, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman may be able to help.
- Attend care plan meetings to get an update on the provision of care for your loved ones and provide feedback and suggestions. Visit with staff as concerns arise so anger and resentment do not build up.

GUILT / REGRET

Will I be harming my loved one by moving him/her into long-term care? Am I taking my loved one away from everything he/she knows and loves? Am I a failure because I can no longer care for my loved one? Why couldn't things have worked out differently?

- Guilt is what we feel when we do something that is wrong or hurtful to someone else; regret is sorrow over something that has happened. When family and friends do not fully understand the demands of a loved one's day-to-day care and do not realize the stress that comes from being a primary caregiver, they may say or do things to make you feel guilty. But as the primary caregiver, you know what type of assistance your loved one needs and the impact that caregiving has on your health. Family and friends can only make you feel guilty if you let them.
- There may be a support group available in your area or through the facility. Contact the Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program at 800.532.3213 to talk about how you are feeling or to find a support group near you.
- Become a volunteer at the facility. Enriching others' lives can be very rewarding.
- Attend the facility's family council meetings or, if there is no family council, help create one. The Office of the State Long-Term Ombudsman can provide you with information about starting a family council.

DEPRESSION / GRIEF

Why am I so sad even though I know moving my loved one into long-term care is the best solution? Why do I feel so lonely? What will I do with my time now that I am not a primary caregiver any longer? My loved one is the person who moved, so why do I feel so disjointed?

- Your life has just taken a serious change in direction and it takes time to adjust. It is not uncommon to feel sad or depressed. Don't be afraid to reach out to others or talk to a professional to help you work through your feelings.
- Do one thing for yourself each day: read a book, go for a walk, go out to lunch with friends, see a movie or focus on hobbies and activities you enjoy.
- Remember that your caregiving duties have not ended; they have just changed. You still have a very important role.
- Find little ways to move forward with your life now that you have more time for yourself.

RELIEF

Is it okay for me to feel relieved now that I can be home alone, sleep through the night, relax and enjoy my hobbies or run errands without worrying about taking care of my loved one?

- Although caregivers are often willing to sacrifice a lot to take care of a loved one, there are things in life everyone should be able to enjoy, like having time alone or getting the rest and relaxation needed to stay healthy. Turning over the daily tasks of caregiving to a professional allows you to once again focus on taking care of yourself, which may actually help your relationship with your loved one improve and flourish.