

Rehab Isn't for Whiners

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For seniors, a move from a life-long home to an assisted living community often comes with its own relocation stress.

Your parent may have a hard time going through their belongings, saying goodbye to familiar surroundings, and adjusting to the lifestyle change that comes with receiving assistance with daily care.

But with some help, your loved one will adjust.

My name is Beth. I am the oldest daughter to a very head strong, loving, I can do it myself kind of woman. Her name is Gayle. Our story may help you in some way.

In a nutshell, Mom fell in her bathroom this past week trying to scrub around the toilet. She landed crooked, hit the lid, and broke her hip. She stayed there on the bathroom floor for about two hours. I'm so grateful that it was a Tuesday! Tuesday is when her cleaning lady, Tammi, comes to clean her home. You may be asking why she was trying to clean her bathroom...on a Tuesday, the day her cleaning lady comes to clean. Yes, I asked the same thing. Remember how I said she was headstrong. This is what I meant.

A 911 call sent her to the ER, and she ended up in surgery complete with a new and improved hip. It also came with the typical hospital stay.

Today the doctor told me that the discharge plan was to send her to a rehab facility for a minimum of two weeks. There she will have physical therapy daily or even two times a day. This will help with her healing, mobility, pain management, and regaining strength.

Mom didn't like hearing this. To say she was resistant to the idea is an understatement. She didn't want to go to another "facility" for two more weeks. She stated that so-and-so from church went and never came out!

The whole scenario reminded me of Amy Winehouses song: Rehab

"They tried to make me go to rehab, But I said, "no, no, no""

I don't think mom was trying to be stubborn, I think she was just exhausted and sick of the hospital bed, the food, and is somewhat of a homebody.

All she could think of was being in her own home, with no hospital sounds keeping her up, and watching her favorite shows without a roommate next to her.



I get it. Heck, she's 85 yrs. old and doesn't want to be told what to do. To be honest, I don't like telling her what to do. But she needed rehab. She needed what only therapy could provide. I also needed someone around 24/7 for my peace of mind.

I thought I was clever when I asked about in-home therapy instead of sending her to the rehab facility from the hospital.

After the doctor asked questions about her home. Was it all on one level? Was the bathroom big enough for a walker and another person to assist her in showering? Did the bathroom have a step-in shower or a tub with a lip to step over? He said it would be ok, in some circumstances, but her house was not safe for her to live in while she was healing.

He was right. She lived in a two story. Her bedroom was upstairs. The only bathroom on the main level was a half bath and it was tiny. The laundry room is in the basement. The scenario wouldn't work very well with her walker and the pain meds.

Now what? I'm her only child but needing to be the parent. Odd feeling indeed.

I went out to the lobby to call my best friend, Wendy. She had been through a broken hip with her Father a year ago. I don't remember what they did, but maybe she could help me sort this out. I needed someone to hand me a solution that would work for both mom and me.

I hit speed dial on "Bestie". We have known each other since college. I trusted her like a sister. Wendy knows my mom and has been a stand-in daughter for her on several occasions when I had been traveling for work. She would want only the best for her. Just like me.

"Wendy, she won't budge. You know her when her mind is made up. I have to figure out a new strategy." I definitely sounded desperate.

Wendy replied, "You probably don't remember, but we ended up getting Dad into an assisted living community that had onsite therapy/rehab. He had a great apartment, food, cleaning and therapy. They called it the VIP Respite Stay"

"What? Why don't I remember this?" Now I sounded excited. I needed to know more.

Wendy laughed, "You don't remember stuff you don't need, Beth. Anyways, it worked out very nicely. Our biggest concern was Dad's safety and that he would eat. He dropped so much weight after the hip surgery I was bringing him Malts from Stella Dairy Delights daily just to beef him up."

This sounded too good to be true. "A VIP Respite Stay? Ok, where did you go? What is the name?"

"I'll bring over the information to you. I still have their information in case I needed it in the future. Don't worry, it will all work out, promise."

That night I sorted through the information Wendy left me on my front porch. I popped open a bottle of Chardonnay to help.

The answer to our dilemma was right there in my hands. A VIP Respite Stay. I thought I could get mom to go along with this plan. It's not a permanent move in, just help for now in a home like setting. She wouldn't need to share a room and the food looked great on their website photos.



The only thing we needed to bring was her clothes for the next three weeks and a few favorite items. I picked up a new pajama and robe set just so that she felt special.

After her first week there, I made an appointment at the salon that is right there at the community. She said she felt like a new woman after a wash, cut, and style.

Here is the twist in my story. After the three weeks of respite were up my mother had made two new friends, painted a landscape of a beach, had a glass of wine at happy hour before dinner every night and had great therapy to help her heal.

Guess what? She didn't want to live at the house anymore. I think she was kicking the tires and really liked the car.

Of course, this made me so happy.



I found a few helpful things I wanted to pass on to you that help make this transition to senior living from her home:

My top five tips:

Here are five tips to help smooth the transition to assisted living.

1. Begin the transition early

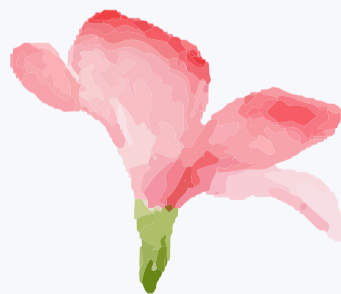
Think about how your parent may react to the thought of moving to assisted living. If you think they would do better with being involved, consider including them in the search for a community. On the other hand, some families may want to present their aging loved one with community options first. Or, like us, do a respite stay!

2. Choose favorite items for your parent's new home

Your parent will likely have less space in their new home. Choosing items to part with can bring up a wide range of emotions and memories.

Downsizing should be handled gently and respectfully.

- **Consider hiring a senior move manager.** These vetted professionals specialize in assisting seniors and can come up with creative solutions to help your loved one downsize smoothly and with dignity. They're especially needed if your parent has a lot of sentimental items, or you live far away.
- **Create a "safe passage" for treasured items.** Let your parent tell you the significance of important pieces, and respectfully help them find a new home for everything they can't take with them. This advice is backed by a study funded by the National Institutes of Health, published in Ageing & Society.
- **Have an estate sale.** Sell items or donate them to charity.



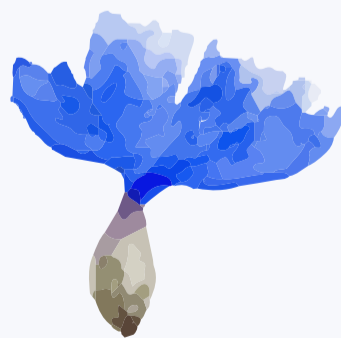
3. Help with logistics

While your parent have a lot to process emotionally, you can help with other items on the to-do list.

- **Keep track of bills.** Cancel recurring bills at your parent's home such as gas, electric, cable, etc.
- **Sort out utilities.** Set up any utilities that your parent may want in their new apartment. Each community handles utilities differently, and your parent may be responsible for things like internet and cable.
- **Schedule help.** Hire movers and bring in other family members to help. For example, one person may spend the day with your parent while another helps to arrange the furniture in their new space.
- **Plan their acclimation.** Meet with the activities director or your parent's caregiver in the community to plan your parent's first few days. Will someone help your parent find activity spaces and meet their new neighbors?

4. Be available

- Even if your parent insists they will be fine, you may want to plan to spend time with your loved one in their community during their first few days. If your parent wants your support, you might take this time to enjoy a meal with them in the dining room, participate in a game night, or just spend time outside exploring the grounds together.
- If your parent wants to acclimate on their own, you can use this time to get to know the caregivers and community staff. Building a rapport with these new members of your parent's care team can help all of you work together smoothly to support your parent.



5. Plan to visit

Hopefully your parent or loved one will have plenty of activities and social events to look forward to, but family relationships will still make up a large part of their identity.

Make sure you plan regular visits. Enlist other family members to visit your parent as well.

- **Plan visits ahead of time.** Hang a calendar for your parent that includes the dates and times when they can expect to see you.
- **Take turns.** If you have multiple family members in town, plan weekly or monthly one-on-one visits with your loved one.
- **Create a group calendar.** Coordinate visits with family and friends so you know your loved one will have the company they want or need.
- **Plan group visits.** Family and friend get-togethers can be fun as well.

With your assistance and support, your loved one can look forward to a fulfilling life in their new senior living community. Although this is an emotional time for your parent, remember to take care of yourself emotionally as well. It's a big adjustment for many to see their loved one move to an assisted living facility, but **many seniors actually find that they prefer it** once they've settled in. With your encouragement, your loved one may feel at home before you know it.

Sources

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