

5 TIPS for caregivers

DEALING WITH TRANSITIONS

Change is hard. Whether it's a cross country move or they stop making your favorite breakfast cereal, we always have to adapt and change on some level. For individuals with memory loss, change can be even harder. Relocation especially, and other significant environment changes, are often traumatic. As a caregiver, knowing what to expect, how you can prepare, and how to make these transitions more comfortable is key. Here are 5 tips for dealing with transitions.

1 Be aware of transfer trauma.

What is transfer trauma? Transfer trauma is defined as "Feelings or symptoms of stress, emotional shock or disturbance, hopelessness or confusion resulting from the resident being moved from one residential environment to another." It sounds like a no brainer, but being aware of changes to your loved one's environment — and the fact that it could be traumatic for them — is a key step to minimizing the trauma in the first place. A move to a residential facility is probably the number one cause of transfer trauma, but remember, smaller changes in the person's environment can also be upsetting. Bringing someone new into the home to provide care can be unsettling. Having the person attend a day facility is also a major change in their daily routine, despite still living at home. That being said, these can all be fantastic services to help provide care - for both you and your loved one. Just be prepared to help your loved one adjust to the new environment.

2 Do your homework early.

Is the care at home becoming more stressful than it used to be when your loved one was first diagnosed? Start looking into options for care. You may not need them until much further down the road — or perhaps never — but as the boy scouts would say, be prepared. It is much easier to do some research now than in the face of an emergency. Tour a few residential facilities nearby, take a look at a day center, or call a couple in-home care agencies to get a sense of what might be the best fit for you and your loved one.

If that emergency situation does arise, you'll be much more comfortable placing your loved one in a facility you toured and liked, rather than having to pick out of a phone book.

3 Do your extra credit.

Once you've decided to have your loved one move into a facility or attend a day center, you can take a few extra steps to ensure their first day goes as smoothly as possible. If moving into a facility, set up the person's room beforehand. Bring in some special belongings, and have a friend help you make the room comfortable before they move in. This will help your loved one feel more immediately settled. If they're starting at a day center, try to start them on a day that includes a favorite activity; perhaps there's a special musical guest or a men's group discussion they would especially enjoy. Have the staff introduce them to other

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participants with similar interests, or backgrounds, to help them feel welcome. At the end of the day, we all want to feel welcome and included; these extra steps can help ensure your loved one will more easily adjust.

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4 Validate their concerns.

You've done your homework, your extra credit, and the day is here for your loved one to attend the new day center, or move into a new facility. We all hope that everything will go perfectly. Sometimes it does, but often they are afraid of their new surroundings — everything is strange in their new environment. They may appear more confused; they are afraid of the unknown. Many feel fear, confusion, depression, anger and rejection. This can manifest through behaviors such as not eating, refusing care, loss of interest or inability to sleep. However, you can minimize this transfer trauma by simply validating their concerns. Kind words can go a long way. Make sure the staff knows your loved one; their interests and background, and can help engage them in familiar activities. Often the person may just want someone to listen and understand their concerns.

5 Give it time.

We'll say it again — change is hard. For everyone involved. Think back to your first night in a new home or at your college dorm — it was probably very unsettling! But just as when they discontinued your favorite fruity-Os, in time you probably discovered your new all-time favorite double super fruity-Os. With big transitions, like a residential move, it can take time to become comfortable. Give the person time to settle in. It may be too difficult to visit your loved one at first, either for you or them. Ask a trusted friend to check in on them; you'll have the peace of mind that they're doing alright, without causing either of you extra stress. Most likely with time, you will both adjust to the new environment.



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