

10 TIPS FOR TOURING SENIOR COMMUNITIES

Finding the right assisted living community is one of the most important decisions you can make. We've compiled the top elements to look for when assessing a senior community. During your visit, consider the quality of care that your loved one may receive, and what type of environment your loved one will enjoy on a daily basis and thrive in. The decision of "if, when and where to move" resides solely with you and your loved one, so consider what factors are ultimately important to you.

1. OBSERVE THE LAYOUT AND TONE OF THE COMMUNITY

Is the layout of the building too large for someone with limited mobility? Too small for someone who is active and needs more stimulation and activity? Does the community feel uncluttered, fresh and clean? Are the colors and décor uplifting? Make sure to look past the furnishings and into corners, baseboards and windows.

Scents in the property may indicate a lack of cleanliness or a temporary problem. If you find smells concentrated to one area on your tour this most likely indicates a single, recent incident. Unusual smells throughout the community most likely indicate a bigger problem. Always ask the manager what they think might be causing the problem.

2. VISIT DURING AN ACTIVITY

It's a good idea to schedule your tour in conjunction with any community events. Ask the manager if you can watch the activities or even participate. Are the activities and events well attended? Does the staff seem to be enjoying the activity as well?

Take a look at the community calendar of events. Do they match your loved one's interests? Do the events and activities vary in size and type? Do they include trips and outings away from the community? If so, where do they go? Are outings limited to the shopping mall or do they also include the theater, museums, libraries and cultural events? If onsite religious services are not offered; then transportation to services will be an important factor to consider.

3. PAY ATTENTION TO STAFF FRIENDLINESS

The attitude and friendliness of the staff are of the utmost importance. Visit before breakfast or after dinner – times when the administrators aren't around. Make sure that you observe several staff members interacting with current residents. Do they listen and make eye contact? Does the staff treat residents with dignity, respect and a smile?

Make sure to get a good understanding of the staffing pattern. How many people are actually involved in residents' care? Make sure you get an introduction to the management team. This will help you understand the goals of the property. It is important that you have confidence in the property's staff.

4. OBSERVE AND GET FEEDBACK FROM RESIDENTS

Observe the residents living there. Are they dressed appropriately, out of their rooms and up for the day? Are they clean shaven with well-groomed hair and nails? Make sure to take into consideration what activities they are involved in and the current weather.

Are there residents from same background or professions? The current residents will be the senior's new best friends. Seniors love to talk about the past and share interesting stories. Ask residents and families, past and present, for their honest opinions about the community. Many communities have a resident council that will be happy to answer any of your questions. Visit MySearch to review feedback from families who have shared their impressions of individual communities.

5. EAT A MEAL AT THE PROPERTY

Food is essential to our quality of life. Make sure you and your loved one enjoy a meal at the community. Not only is it a great way to sample the cuisine, but it also opens up a great opportunity to meet some of the residents. Discuss what happens if a resident is unable to make it to the dining room for a meal. It is also important to discuss entree choices and learn about dining hours, options and procedures. In your own home, if you don't feel like eating breakfast at 7:30 a.m., you don't have to. You can have breakfast at 10 a.m.. Make sure your loved one can eat or snack at any time.

6. ASK SECURITY AND SAFETY QUESTIONS

Make sure you find out about staffing patterns to determine who is on-site at all times to assist residents. Are there registered nurses or physicians on site? How do staffing patterns differ at night? Safety and security are among the most important features of a community. Make sure that bathrooms are accessible and have grab bars in convenient locations. Ask how residents contact staff if they have an emergency in their living area. Find out about other safety features available in living quarters and throughout the community.

7. ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL CARE

As you go through the tour process make sure you ask a lot of questions about personal care. How does the community assist or manage residents' medication needs? Don't forget to ask specific questions about any other medical needs that must be met for you or your loved one. Is there a nutritionist on site for special dietary needs? Discuss bathing options and bathing preferences. Is there advanced care provided? Or, will the resident need to move for higher care services?

What are the limitations?

Ask how often housekeeping is provided in personal living spaces. Make sure you get full details on the types of maintenance provided and the estimated response times. Don't forget to ask about laundry procedures. Ask for specifics on what is available and at what cost.

8. VISIT THE OUTDOOR AREAS

Everyone wants to be able to enjoy a nice sunny day outdoors. While visiting communities make sure to investigate the outdoor areas that are available to residents. Does the area feel safe and secure? Does the property house outdoor activities in these areas? Does the staff use the same area for their personal breaks?

9. ASK ABOUT MOVE-OUT CRITERIA

Most people do not enjoy moving multiple times and seniors are no different. Ask about specific move-out criteria. Under what circumstances is a resident asked to move out of the community? What type of notice does the resident or caregiver need to give the staff? In many instances a 30-day notice may be required by the property.

10. TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

As you tour communities; compare your observations about the layout, the tone of the community, type of resident the community caters to, and whether the activity level will be suitable for your loved one. How "homelike" is the community? Do you imagine your loved one being comfortable? Do you feel at ease? Are the staff and residents open, inviting and friendly? Always remember to follow your instincts and your heart!