Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

A Guide to Choosing Retirement Apartments

Rental retirement units are dedicated to elders and are often operated by government or non-profit agencies, keeping costs low.



Most provide some level of ongoing assistance and arrange for regular visits by health-care providers. Some offer graduated services to meet changing needs, which can be an excellent option for people who are starting to have some difficulties with independent living and anticipate their needs may increase. This may bring considerable peace of mind to you and to your relative.

Apartment units vary greatly in size, style, location and, of course, price. Although you may have ideas in mind, try to be patient and show your relative you respect his or her right to make decisions. Make it clear you are there to help support them through the selection process, not to interfere or impose your will.

Location

When considering various facilities, here are some tips to keep in mind regarding location:

- Is it close enough for family and friends to visit? Can your relative easily get out to visit?
- Is there transportation and shopping nearby?
- How far are churches, parks and senior centres?
- Is there easy access to health-care providers, including clinics, dentists and hospitals?
- Is it noisy or quiet? Does it suit the elder's preferences?

As with any new home, you'll want to tour the facility first. Depending on your relative's mobility and stamina, he or she may want you to visit several facilities on your own and then draw up a list for the older adult to visit with you.

Remember that meal arrangements can be of great importance. If communal dining services are available, stay for lunch or dinner. Ask to see the menus and discuss what options are available.

Watch how the residents respond to the staff. Talk to some of the residents about the facility's best points and disadvantages. When touring potential facilities, bring along a pen and notebook so that you can record necessary details throughout the tour. Also be sure to ask:

- What services are available? Housekeeping? Medical? Laundry? Exercise?
- Are there social and recreation programs? Do they fit with your relative's interests?
- Are there extra charges for services?
- Is phone or cable service included?
- Are the apartment units furnished or unfurnished? If furnished, can your relative bring some favorite possessions?
- Are pets allowed?
- Who operates the facility? Are there special rules or restrictions?

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Regarding the building itself, there are further considerations that you'll want to keep in mind. During the tour, be sure to ask:

- Is the building well maintained?
- Are common areas clean and bright?
- Are common areas air conditioned?
- Do apartments have individual temperature control?
- Are there adequate fire and smoke alarms?
- Is there a sprinkler in each apartment?
- Is there a call bell or paging system?
- Is the central kitchen clean and well maintained?
- Are staff members polite and responsive?
- Do both residents and staff look happy?

Additional Concerns

Further, don't hesitate to ask the facility for references from other residents or families of residents, and for samples of social calendars and menus. You can also request copies of admission forms and sample payment invoices, to give you a better idea of the paperwork ahead and the kind of information you'll need to provide.

Some retirement apartment facilities will be happy to arrange an overnight visit or temporary longer visit for potential residents. This can be an excellent way for everyone to judge the likely fit of the apartments with your relative's needs and desires. As well, be sure to keep the lines of communication open between you and your elder relative so that you can ensure their new home will suit their preferences.