

ASSISTED LIVING: QUALITY OF LIFE

A checklist of questions dealing with socializing, meals, safety, and other issues to consider when you and your loved one visit an assisted living facility.

Activities and Socializing

When looking at the activities a facility offers, think about your preferences. Some people enjoy scheduled activities, such as current events discussions, crafts, bingo, card games, etc. Others have never been “activities people” and won’t care to participate. They would rather read a book or go for a walk. A third group may want to spend a lot of time at cultural or community events such as museums, theaters and concerts. The last group will be more concerned about location of the facility and whether transportation is available, its cost, and who goes on these trips. Look at a monthly activity schedule, do the activities appeal to the resident?

How often are activities in the community scheduled? What staff are included?

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Can residents walk on the grounds? Are there protected/enclosed walking areas for residents with dementia?

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How are religious/spiritual needs met? Is there transportation to the resident’s church or synagogue? Is there room and arrangements for worship programs in the facility?

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Who develops and supervises recreational activities? What is this person's background?

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How do residents give input towards activities offered?

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Meals

Meals are important to many residents of assisted living. Sample a few meals, how does the food taste? If your loved one has special dietary needs, describe them and ask how those needs can be met. Ask to see a printed menu for the month. Does it look appealing?

What times are meals served?

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What if meals are skipped regularly? Is the answer different if a resident is confused?

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Can a tray be delivered to the resident's room? Is there an additional charge?

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Are there choices available for meal options or alternatives for dietary restrictions?

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Are snacks available at any time? What kinds of snacks are available?

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Does a nutritionist or dietitian review meals and special diets? If yes, how often?

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Safety /Choices

Assisted living facilities emphasize independence and choice as vital to their philosophy. They also have rules and procedures designed to protect residents from harm. It is important to match the ability with the extent of choices and opportunities offered by the facility, as well as the limitations it will impose. Facilities vary with regard to the extent of protection they offer residents and may use negotiated risk agreements or contracts when issues of safety and choice arise. Because each facility may define the terms differently, use a different term, or not believe in using such agreements, ask the facility whether it uses any form of negotiated risk agreements. If they do, they should clearly explain what they mean by the terms that they use and how they use such agreements in practice at the facility.

What safety measures are in place to protect residents from wandering away? Personal property being stolen?

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What if a resident wants an exception to a policy, e.g. signing in and out, smoking, or eating foods that are not on a prescribed diet? Is the answer different if a resident is confused?

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Are background checks performed on all staff? What kind?

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Which doors of the facility are locked and when? When doors are locked, how does one access the home? Are exit doors alarmed?

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Are there safety locks on the windows?

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Are there call bells in each room and bathroom? How often are they checked to be sure they are working correctly?

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Is there a fire emergency plan? Are there fire drills? Are emergency plans publicly displayed?

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Is the floor covering of the facility made of nonskid material?

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Facility Initiated Discharge

Answers to these questions will help you clarify a facility’s ability to care for people with health and behavior conditions that are more difficult to manage. It will also help you determine what recourse is available if your loved one is asked to leave.

What are potential reasons for discharge?

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Is there an internal appeal process? What is it?

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How many days notice is given and to whom?

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How does the facility assist your loved one if they proceed with discharge?

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Accessibility

Are hallways, doorways, bathrooms and common areas fully accessible to people in wheelchairs?

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If it is a multi-floor facility, what are the safety arrangements for escape in case of fire for people in wheelchairs?

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Questions About Hospice Care

A checklist of questions to ask as you try to find the right hospice service for your loved one.

Involvement with a hospice service can be a choice that is planned for, or one that comes up suddenly. Regardless, it helps to know the right questions to ask when shopping for hospice care.

Below are some of the most important questions you should ask when interviewing a hospice service. Before you go to an interview, print this list of questions, read over it, and identifies the questions that are most important to you and your loved one. Take the sheet along with you, and jot down the answers during the interview. If you go on several interviews, the answers to this questionnaire will allow you to more easily compare services and decide which is right for your loved one.

Is the hospice accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body?

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Is the program Medicare and/or Medicaid certified?

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Does the state require hospice licensing? If so, is the hospice licensed?

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Is there written documentation regarding the eligibility requirements, financial aspects, employee jobs, liability insurance, and general services of the hospice?

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Will the hospice provide references from the other healthcare organizations?

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Is the hospice in good standing with the Better Business Bureau or State Attorney General's office?

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How flexible is the hospice service in negotiating patient differences?

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Does the hospice work with the family to generate a professional plan of care for each patient? Will the services provide you with a copy of this plan?

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Is this plan updated periodically or when the need arises?

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Does the hospice require a primary caregiver?

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Will the hospice work with the caregiver to cover job schedules, travel plans, or other responsibilities?

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Does the hospice hold an evaluation to determine patient needs?

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Does the hospice consider what the patient can do for him or herself?

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How many personnel references does the hospice require?

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Are the hospice workers licensed and bonded?

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Does the hospice have a routine way of handling complaints?

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How does the hospice handle billing?

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Will the hospice help find financial assistance?

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Are there payment plans available?

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Does the hospice have a 24 hour on-call service?

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Did the hospice inform you of the patient's rights and responsibilities?

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How quickly do the hospice services begin?

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What specialized services are available?

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What are the policies regarding residential admission? Inpatient care?

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Which hospitals work closely with the residential facilities?

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Notes