

Handy Hints for Finding a Care Home

1. Often people don't start thinking about a care home until there's a crisis, when a parent has had to go into hospital or it's no longer safe for them to stay in their own home. There can come a time when they need more care than can be provided at home, or the person who cares for them might fall ill and no longer be able to cope. We all know it's very difficult to make a good decision when you're tired, stressed and feeling under pressure. Plan ahead. Get lots of information, visit places, and talk it over with your friends and family.
2. It's natural to feel it's your job to after your mum and dad when they become older and frail, but try not to make promises you might not be able to keep, no matter how much you want to. Explore all the options in advance. There are ways of enabling a parent to stay in their own home as long as possible, but realise that there may well come a time when they will need 24 hour professional care, which even people with substantial means would struggle to provide in their own homes.
3. There are lots of factors to consider when choosing a care home. Location is often top of the list. Moving a parent closer to you might make things easier, but consider the possible effects of taking your mum or dad away from familiar surroundings and if their friends and neighbours will still be able to visit.
4. Finding the right care home for your mum or dad can take time. Have a look at the Care Inspectorate website, which provides information and grading for care homes. You might get a recommendation from a social worker, friend or relative. It's always good to arrange a visit. Is the building bright and homely? Is it easy to find your way around if you have mobility issues or dementia? Do the staff have appropriate qualifications?
5. Families are complicated. Family members might not agree on whether mum or dad need to go into a care home or the best location. Every individual will have different needs. Think about what your parent might like. Would they enjoy a big home with a lots going on and loads of people to talk to, or somewhere it's ok to spend a lot of time quietly in your own room?
6. Cost is another big consideration. Your local authority will pay for basic care home care, but only if you don't have a home to sell, or savings, or a pension income. Families sometimes pay top up fees to get the level of care that they want. If you are moving a parent from one local authority to another, don't assume they will automatically pick up the tab. Paying for care home care can be complicated - always seek independent financial advice.
7. It's not always obvious how to navigate 'the system' and work out who does what. Social workers do assessments to decide the level of care needed and if you need to make a financial contribution. Health workers like doctors and nurses take care of the physical condition of your parent. You might also be assigned a link worker or anticipatory care nurse. It's mainly down to you to coordinate between different agencies and the care home, and make decisions, especially if your parent no longer has full capacity due to a condition like dementia.
8. Most people experience feelings of guilt when a parent needs to go into a care home. It can be even harder if a parent is reluctant to make this move. It's important to know that sometimes you might have to make the best decision for your mum or dad, even if they

don't seem very happy about it at the time. After a while, they may well settle in and start to enjoy the benefits of living in a care home.

9. When a parent goes into a care home, you might experience other emotions too. You might be worried if the staff will like your mum or dad and take good care of them, treating them with the dignity and respect they deserve. You will probably still feel very responsible for looking after them and keeping them safe, but with less control as care home staff have their own ways of working. Don't be afraid to ask questions or let them know your parent's preferences.
10. Think about the future. You're never too young to start talking about what might happen. Discuss what you might want with your children and your partner. Talk to your siblings and parents. It's not an easy conversation to have, but it will be much harder if you leave it until a crisis or it's too late when your mum or dad is no longer able to clearly express their wishes. If you're an older person, be open to talking about the future with your family.