

# Moving Seniors: Settling into Senior Care



Moving seniors is never as simple as we'd like. You may think your job is done once the move date for your loved one is set. But your involvement will only continue, as she or he transitions to a new home and adjusts to the new surroundings. Whether nearby or at a distance, you are still one of the primary caregivers, regardless of the living arrangement. We here at Marshall Estate Liquidators, Inc., a family owned and operated company, can help with this job so that it isn't overwhelming while also helping your senior transition to the new phase in their life. Here are some suggestions and guidelines from A Place for Mom that can significantly smooth the transition and promote harmonious living in a retirement or long-term care community if you choose to handle the move alone. These are guidelines we use in helping our senior and their family through this very stressful time making it a stress free and a seamless process.

## **PLANNING THE MOVE & SETTING UP THE NEW ENVIRONMENT**

Most seniors benefit more when you provide the actual physical assistance in packing and unpacking rather than your dos and don'ts about what to take and what to leave. Our senior moving service will work with your senior to help make the decisions of what to take and what to leave based on where they are moving. We take care of the packing and coordinating the actual move. Once at the new location we handle the unpacking so your loved one simply travels to their new home and is immediately at home among their familiar belongings. Creating a new home can be a highly personal and potentially emotional process and ensuring choices rather than issuing mandates about possessions is one method that may foster a better sense of identity and comfort for mom or dad in the new location. Our goal as your moving coordinator is to maintain your senior's sense of identity and comfort as they make this transition from the familiar to the unknown. We are the caring independent party to help support them in their choices while still making sure your goal is met of moving your loved one to a place that is best for them.

It may be helpful to encourage a meaningful farewell from whatever place mom or dad is leaving. Whether it is the family home of many decades or a hasty move from assisted living to a higher level of care, your parent has established relationships with people and some sense of continuity of place in the familiar setting. It is vital that they have the time to make their farewells and not feel that they need to suppress the emotions that may surface. Part of our job in the services we provide to our seniors is the support both emotional and physical. We bring to each move our sincere care and understanding that is needed in this type of emotional change in one's life.

One of Jeannette Franks, PhD friends Elaine M.<sup>1</sup>, a Seattle grief counselor in practice for many years, created her own ceremony when she moved. She held a dinner party in her house with family and a few close friends, and then they visited each room by candlelight, remembering special events, commenting on the changes over time, and saying goodbye. For her, this helped start a better beginning in the new community.

Though we at Marshall Estate Liquidators have not yet had this request and we would be happy to host one, we do take time to reminisce with our seniors and let them take the time needed to say good bye to a place that in most cases has been a significant part of their life and memories.

## **ESTABLISHING A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT**

When in doubt about what to take, it may be good to err on the side of hanging on to "stuff" a bit longer, even if space is tight, as it often is in a new setting. We have found in assisting our seniors that there is always a hidden hole for most of what our seniors want to bring and there is no harm in getting rid of it later when they are settled and ready to let go. Possessions can be discarded later, after thoughtful contemplation. Don't rush these decisions when moving seniors, especially if they seem difficult. Jeannette Franks, PhD remembers one retired university professor, Henry L., who ruthlessly culled his books, donating many valuable volumes to a library. He later lamented his decision and mourned his missing books. Even though he knew he may never have opened some of them again, they were long-time companions and he missed them profoundly. No matter how unimportant the items may seem to us these items are sentimental and important to our seniors for some reason. That alone is a good reason to try our best to see that they can take these items with them.

When moving seniors, establishing a familiar environment, rather than buying the perfect new couch or carpet, can ease the adjustment. There is nothing better than the look on our senior's face when they walk into their new residence and feel like they are home, surrounded by all their familiar belongings.

When Jeannette Franks' father moved to assisted living, she helped him arrange his bedroom so that when he awoke, his gaze met the same bookshelves, books, souvenirs, and family photos he

had first seen when he awakened in the family home of 20 years. The living room was set up with the same old recliner, TV, pictures, and ornaments. He felt immediately at home, and it especially helped keep him oriented in the difficult process of mid-stage Alzheimer's.

This is our primary goal for all our seniors and the way we ensure that this transition is as stress free as possible.

## **WHAT TO PACK WHEN MOVING TO ASSISTED LIVING**

As mentioned, establishing a familiar environment for your parent is important for nostalgia purposes. However, you also have to consider that your parent will most likely be moving to a much smaller location, so you'll have to identify what's truly important to keep. And no one knows your loved one better than you, so make sure you bring their favorite belongings.

As your moving coordinator, we make sure we are familiar with the new residence and with this knowledge we guide our senior in their choices making sure they bring what they will need and as many of their cherished treasures as possible so that their new home is just as comfortable and familiar as the one they have just left.

Try to recreate the look and feel of what they enjoy with their beloved pictures, decor and books – but avoid clutter.

In helping establish our senior's new home we take the living space size and layout into consideration. We try to fit as much of their past life into their new one. For the items left behind we inventory and take pictures of each item placing it all in an online auction. This gives all these cherished treasures new homes. Once the buyers have come to pick up their purchases, we allow the family the choice of gifting or donating the remaining items to friends, family, charitable organization of their choice, or the community help organizations if you don't think your parent will need or use them. This serves several purposes. First it provides the family and senior with funds to cover the move. Secondly the it gives the senior the sense that these belongings were of value and these treasures have found new homes not simply been discarded

Remember that simplicity is the name of the game. You don't need to waste money on new furniture. Recreate the look and feel of your loved ones' previous home with the furniture and accessories they already own that fit well in the new space. Or you can let us, Marshall Estate Liquidators, do it for you and take away the stress and overwhelming pressure of this important job.

Here's a list of items we start with to bring with your parent to assisted living:

### ***Basic Furniture***

- Sofa
- Chairs
- End tables
- Nightstand
- Coffee table
- Lamps

### ***Decor***

- Picture Frames
- Keep-sakes
- Artwork
- Clock

- Vase of flowers
- Books

### **Clothing**

- Casual clothing
- Pajamas
- Sweaters
- Jackets/Coats
- Formal clothing (if there is an occasion or they have a sentimental attachment)

Of course, your parent's toiletries are also a must. Let them help you decide what they can and cannot live without (within reason, of course!).

We allow our seniors to make their first list and choices then try to have them justify why they chose some of the items that may be better left behind and sold or donated. If they seem set on their choices, we err on the side of moving the items and discarding them later. It is best emotionally to have our seniors decide when they are ready to let go. Our interior decorator will replicate, as much as possible, the original home and position tastefully all the treasures that were kept.

## **WORKING WITH STAFF**

Often, what's your job, what's their job, and what's somewhere in between is unclear. By choosing our service, we take all that indecision away as well as the risk of vital tasks not getting done on time because the job division was unclear in the moving process. With us handling the move you and your parent can take time and carefully review the lengthy contractual document full of legalese and take the time to decipher the difference between a nurse, an aide, and a resident assistant, for example. Or take care of getting the power of attorney completed. Most of you who are moving seniors are dealing with a [retirement community](#) or long-term care community for the first time and it is not intuitively obvious what a social worker does or what the duties of an activities director are. These are very important issues and you and your senior need to concentrate on these issues and allow us to handle the logistics of the transition.

## **DESIGNATING A PRIMARY POINT PERSON**

Ask your initial contact at the facility you choose, often a marketing director, who your primary liaison person will be. In visiting many different retirement and long-term care communities, the personnel in all of them vary considerably, depending on number of employees and number of residents, style of elder care services, budget, and acreage. It is important to take your time and make sure you find out as much as you can. Do your homework on the facility and talk to as many people as possible.

You probably don't want to stop the first person you see in the hall to take care of a housekeeping issue or to fix a leaky faucet. Find out who the main "point person" is. In many communities, the general manager or second in command to the top administrator will be that person. He or she can explain to you who to talk to in various circumstances. It might even be helpful to ask for an organization chart and even job descriptions, if available. Another key is the tenure of the employees a high turnover can be a red flag.

Conversely, it is important that the office staff knows who the primary "point person" within your family is. We will need to establish this also when you hire us to move your loved one. Though we welcome the whole family to part take in the move it is important to know who the final decision rests with in the family besides the senior. This makes scheduling more efficient as there will be a couple decisions to be made by the family during the move. This structure and delegation of responsibility

allows for better organization and less confrontation. You want to be clear about whom to contact in case of emergency and who would be the backup to that family member, in case the primary family contact cannot be reached or lives at a distance.

## MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

In some communities, elder care services such as obtaining emergency medications are handled by staff. In other situations this may be up to a family member. [Assisted living](#) can be defined quite differently from state to state, and sometimes quite differently within the same city.

Try not to get a reputation for being “the difficult daughter/son/family member” if you can possibly help it. Remember Jeannette Franks’ dear friend Mary who was working hard to help her mother settle in comfortably to an assisted living community. The third day there she complained to one of the housekeeping staff that some soiled linens had not yet been removed from the bathroom. Many communities provide fresh linens only on a weekly basis. So find out what the norm is for their elder care services. Do your research before the move and keep a log by community so that you can make informed decisions when choosing.

Ask staff what you can do to help them do their jobs well. For example, Jeannette Franks taking her father out to lunch on the day they cleaned his room helped housekeeping to discharge their duties more quickly and efficiently. Then, if an unexpected mess occurred on a different day, they would have more time and good will to deal with it. Not all families will be able to do this but if you can it will go along way with the staff.

In a [nursing home](#) with round-the-clock staff, elder care services are not usually provided 24/7. The people on graveyard shift are there for emergencies and for routine care that must be provided in the middle of the night-for example, repositioning a resident in bed to prevent or to help heal bed sores. It’s usually unrealistic to expect staff to provide room service if mom wants a midnight snack. Find out what can be expected and what is considered above and beyond the call of duty.

Some residents in long-term care communities might benefit from an advocate, especially if you live at a distance and cannot be there on a regular basis. The national long-term care ombudsman program provides trained volunteers in every county who visit every facility on a regular basis (see <http://www.ltcombudsman.org>).

Your family member might desire a paid companion who has the time and motivation to make certain that your mom or dad has the best possible quality of life. Jeannette Franks was visiting her mother-in-law once in a Florida nursing home with exceptionally high standards of care. But during her visit she heard a woman, undoubtedly with one of the dementias, calling out, “Help me-please help me!” she went in and held her hand, asking how she could help. She immediately became calmer and soon fell peacefully asleep. This was a busy skilled care facility and the staff simply did not have the time to just sit and hold someone’s hand. But Jeannette Franks did.

Get to know the staff who work directly with a family member-often the CNAs (certified nursing assistants), aides, and resident assistants or caregivers-and learn their names and what they do, both officially and unofficially. Thank them for a job well done at every opportunity. Written thank you notes are especially appreciated and mean a great deal. When someone does an excellent job, it makes a difference to send a staff person a letter thanking them for a job well done and send a copy to their supervisor and sometimes nominate them for a caregiver award. The local Alzheimer’s Associations, State Pioneer Networks (see <http://www.pioneernetwork.org/>) and organizations such as the associations for homes for the aging (see <http://www.aahsa.org/>) for your state usually have recognition events, which are important because they help to improve care for everyone.

Most [senior housing](#) communities forbid or discourage tipping for their elder care services. Usually there is a scholarship or Christmas fund to which you can contribute. Also you may consider bringing a holiday or birthday gift for the people you felt were doing the most.

Every family is as different as a fingerprint and what works well for one might not work well in yours. Marshall Estate Liquidators are here to provide the additional help you may need when taking on this very delicate endeavor. If you find yourself needing guidance with the process of moving your loved one, we are here to provide the relocation service and assist with the emotional and physical aspects of this transition. We personalize our services to meet your loved one's needs and preferences.

Most importantly, planning ahead when [moving elderly parents](#) and seniors and understanding the new environment will always help families and their loved ones enjoy the community and maintain happy family ties.

Original article written by Jeannette Franks, PhD, is a passionate gerontologist who teaches at University of Washington and Bastyr University; she is the author of a book on assisted living and numerous articles.

<sup>1</sup> All names in this article have been changed to protect privacy.

Original Article taken from [aplaceformom.com](#). We have taken this article which we felt had great advice and tips and added details of our services to give you a view of both sides. We hope it helps you in your decision making process of whether to handle the move yourself or let us help you make this experience a stress free one.