



Moving your AGING parents

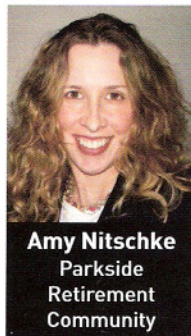
By Anita Martin

Moving from a place you've lived for 20, 30 or 40 years can be an overwhelming and frightening experience. When it's time for your parent(s) to move in with you or to an apartment, a condo, an assisted living facility or a memory house, how can you help them make a healthy move?

"Adult children typically think [their parents] are going to come to them when they're ready for assisted living," says **Amy Nitschke**. "Unfortunately, more often than not, they don't realize that time has come." It's best,

therefore, to broach the subject of housing and aging early on.

Since the term "assisted living" is quite broad, learn about the full gamut of assisted living care. "We're all very unique as far as the care we can handle," explains Nitschke, community relations



director for **Parkside Retirement Community**, which offers private apartments for assisted living residents.

When it's time to consider assisted living, prescreening helps facilitate the selection process. "I think the key is for adult children to narrow it down to two or three places they like, and then bring them to tour or have a meal," Nitschke says. It can overwhelm parents to participate in the full shopping process; by screening and ruling out facilities "ultimately, the decision is still being made by the senior." Don't know where to start? She suggests calling social workers or case managers at facilities and asking questions.

The last thing most people want is "to change their life and move because their adult child is telling them to," Nitschke cautions. Role reversals, which often come into play, are unnatural and can be tough; focusing on the end result helps. "I've never had a senior *want* to move to assisted living, but I've never had a resident unhappy *once they got here*," she says.

Downsizing to "right size"

Cynthia R. Jaggi offers tips for helping your loved one make a successful physical, as well as emotional, transition to assisted liv-

Remember the three Rs

Be realistic. See your parents *as they are now* — not the way you would like them to be (or the way they think they are now). We often get stuck with a picture of a person that may not reflect their current situation or circumstance.

Be reasonable. What living arrangements and health care delivery systems will work for them (and you)? Know your *non-negotiables*; consider lifestyles, finances, interests, values, needs and desires as well as the more practical issues, like location.

Be ready. Be prepared! Make important decisions before a crisis situation occurs. It is never best to make life-altering decisions in a hurry.

Tips provided by Bonnie Yarger, long-term care expert with experience in CCRCs (Continuing Care Retirement Communities), nursing homes and assisted living.

ing or a smaller living environment. "If requested, help with packing, moving and sorting," rather than taking over the process and making all the decisions, says Jaggi, director of marketing and outreach for **Harbor Senior Concepts, LLC**.

Jaggi suggests allocating sufficient time to sort through "a lifetime of deeply valued possessions." She encourages people "to think about what means the most to them," not necessarily what's the most expensive. "Take small segments of time, almost daily if possible," to identify what to take to the new environment, which items to pass to family members ahead of time, and what's going to a resale shop or charity. Devote half a day to work through one room at a time, tagging items accordingly with sticky adhesives.

Planning ahead is the key to avoiding a crisis situation from a time and space perspective. Evaluate the space at the new location by drawing a floor plan. "This helps them visualize their furniture and how much room they're going to have," Jaggi says.

As an adult child, remember to focus on the person who's moving and avoid making light of the transition. "Listen as they talk about what they've left behind," she advises. Strive to be positive, patient and understanding, even if you do not agree with the [moving] decision, she says.

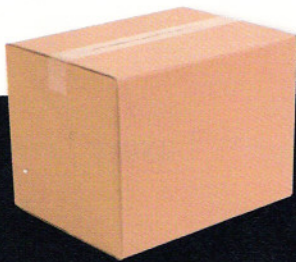
Besides not criticizing your parents' decision, avoid making promises you can't keep. For example, Jaggi says, telling your mother or father, "'Just try the assisted living and if you don't like it, you can come back home by summertime,' when health issues are such that they're really not going to be able to come back home again."

Moving is stressful for all involved, including adult children and friends, and sadness often sets in because the homestead is gone. "One thing we feel strongly about is helping everybody make that emotional transition," Jaggi says. "I think the key is to give it time."

Adult children help create a lifeline of support for their parents. "The loved one who's moved into a new [assisted living] residence doesn't want to be seen or treated differently," Jaggi says. "Remember, they have not changed, just their address." Make those relationships as normal as possible, though during those first few weeks or months, visit or call more often.



Anita Martin is a Madison-area freelance writer.



More help for moving your parents

Books

No Ordinary Move: Relocating Your Aging Parents, by Barbara Z. Perman, Ph.D. and Jim Ballard. Includes 8 stages of a healthy move. Visit www.noordinarymove.com.

Moving in the Right Direction: The Senior's Guide to Moving and Downsizing, by Bruce Nemovitz, Senior Real Estate Specialist. Visit www.movingintherightdirection.org.

Case managers

Case managers work out of the Senior Center Focal Points, located throughout every area of Dane County. The case managers assess the older person's needs and help family members navigate the diverse network of older adult services. The Area Agency on Aging works closely with them in coordinating the Senior Nutrition Program, Family Caregiver Support Program, Elder Abuse and Neglect, Benefit Specialists, etc. For information, contact Claire Culbertson at 261-5679.

Web sites

National Association of Senior Move Managers: www.nasmm.org

Segues Senior Move Specialists: www.segues.net

Organize your downsize move

By Nancy Kruschke McKinney

A move that requires downsizing a home can be stressful, especially if the move is not voluntary. Here are some suggestions to assist you and your parents in prioritizing and organizing to reduce that stress and make the experience a little more manageable.

1. Pack irreplaceable heirloom and keepsakes in a special trunk or container. Ask, "What would we grab in case of a fire?" These are the items you should handle personally.
2. Make a "give away" list — those items you'd like family or friends to have. You may want to have family choose items that are extra special to them. To avoid family squabbles, you can draw numbers to determine who chooses first, second, etc. These items should be delivered or picked up prior to the move date.
3. Make a special pile for charity. Donating special or valuable items to the less fortunate can be a fulfilling experience.
4. Measure the big items and the space into which your parents will move. Visualize where things will go; then draw them out on graph paper to scale to be sure they will fit.
5. What types of activities will be available at the new location? No garden, no need for gardening equipment. No biking, no need for bikes, etc. In other words, don't move what doesn't need to be moved.

Involve other family or friends if you can. Not only is it helpful to share the workload, it's also helpful to share the *emotional load* that may be connected to a move. A great way to get that help is to be specific — ask for help "by driving this stuff to Goodwill" or "by taking one or two loads to a storage facility." People are much more willing to commit to a short project. And when they do, they will often go above and beyond!

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