



Letting Love Lead:

Navigating the Guilt of Transitioning
a Loved One into Senior Living

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The decision to transition your loved one into a senior living community is not one families take lightly. Often, **when you're making the choice** to move your loved one to a senior living community, you're facing a tough situation. Your loved one may be having a harder time taking care of themselves and may have even had a recent injury or incident that made it clear their care needs are greater than can be met at home, but they may also be resistant to change, even change that will help. You have probably spent a lot of time and energy trying to support your loved one as they age, whether with active caregiving or trying to help manage things from afar. You may be stressed and could be rapidly approaching caregiver burnout yourself.

Guilt can arise as you grapple with feelings of tension around your loved one's care needs, your own exhaustion from caregiving and worry, and trying to cope with your loved one having a hard time exchanging the home they've known for the unknown of a senior living community.

At Tuscan Gardens of Palm Coast, we know that a decision to move your loved one into a senior living community can include a great deal of guilt because many of us have experienced this firsthand. You're not alone. Through this writing, we hope you'll come to learn that a caring, invested team of care providers and a close, connected community of residents come together to enrich the lives of residents each day, providing you with peace of mind and the opportunity to be a son, daughter, grandson/granddaughter, again.





Moving your loved one to a senior living community is an act of love

When you transition your loved one to a senior living community, you show them how much you care. You are not abandoning them; you are expanding their care team and community so they can simultaneously receive support from many directions.

In a senior living community, your loved one will regularly spend time with peers and develop lasting friendships with people they can relate to and enjoy on their own level.

With careful research, you will find a care team that can meet their changing needs and act as an extended family who get to know them personally and show them how cared for they truly are.

You will still be a part of their life while offering yourself balance so you can continue to be the best caregiver possible for them.

You are showing the depth of your love for them by carefully selecting a senior living community that is structured to support them and offer them a new lease on life.

Feeling guilty is common when moving your loved one to a senior living community

At least half of people who transition their loved ones to a senior living community feel guilt over the decision. It's important to remember that guilt is normal; you aren't alone in experiencing it, and it doesn't mean you're making the wrong decision.

Guilt from your loved ones

Your loved one may feel defensive and anxious about moving into a new place, concerned it won't feel like home. They may express feelings about being left behind or abandoned, and they may feel like they aren't being valued or respected as adults who still have plenty of life left to live.

When they direct these hard feelings toward you as you try to make the right choice, it can bring about a lot of guilt. You want to show respect and care to your loved one, but your choices and explanations may not be enough to ease their fears or your guilt.

Guilt from others' opinions

It's common for people in your life to share their opinions on moving your loved one to a senior living community. Siblings, friends, neighbors, and even strangers are not shy about expressing opinions. "I could never do that," or "Don't you worry they'll just be forgotten?" may be things you hear, and these judgments can bring about plenty of guilt.

It's important to remember two things as you grapple with guilt from your loved ones and others. First, you are not interested in abandoning your loved one in a community; you're looking for a thriving senior living community to uplift them and provide a community where they can be active, build relationships, and receive top-notch care. Second, these people are often not the ones helping care for your loved one. They don't know the specifics of your situation, and so their opinions aren't informed enough to be worth worrying about.

Guilt from burning out when taking care of your aging loved one on your own

You care about your loved one, and you'd love to be able to help them age in place in their home, or even yours, if it were possible to provide the safety and social support they need. However, many find that trying to run their own lives while caretaking can result in hard tradeoffs. People may disrupt their careers and rearrange their lives to help their loved ones as they age. But even then, health issues, accidental injuries, difficulties with communication, and increasing daily care needs can make even family care insufficient for your loved one.

It can be hard to accept that your loved one's needs are beyond your ability. Falling short on something you care about can hurt, and you may feel guilty about needing extra support, even if it is completely normal to have multiple people involved in caring for an aging loved one.

Grief over the changes in your loved one's life

Alongside the guilt of feeling you aren't able to do it all on your own, it can be hard to watch a loved one age. Their abilities change, and their care needs grow. You can remember earlier phases in their life when they were more active and may have even been a caretaker in your life. When those roles switch, it can be tough to wrap your head around the change. The process of accepting aging in your loved one can take time and can come with grief as you mourn the person you remember and worry for the person you know now.

This grief can be compounded by worry over your loved one's health and safety, so the hard feelings of grief and guilt can feed into each other. A great release valve for that grief and guilt is adding more people to your loved one's care team. Moving them to a senior living community can help you soothe some of the grief and guilt. You'll see firsthand that a caring, invested team of care providers and a close, connected community of residents come together to enrich the lives of residents each day.





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She had her own place, but she was digressing, not taking care of herself, not eating, not socializing...[My mom moved into Tuscan Gardens of Palm Coast, and] once she let her guard down and started engaging with the other residents, I think that was the a-ha moment.

– **Lisa, daughter of resident**

“Could I have done more?”

Caregivers often find themselves in a difficult situation when it comes to caring for aging loved ones. Their ability to provide support is not endless, and there is a point when extra help is required. It may be the case that home health care is the best choice, but often, an aging loved one's care needs are higher even than what a health aide can provide.

You may worry that you weren't patient or loving enough or that if you had put a little more effort in, things would have clicked into place, and this move wouldn't have been necessary. It's normal to experience a range of feelings around caretaking, even anger and frustration, and it's important to recognize when you've hit a limit of what you can do on your own.

Often, choosing the senior living community option is what “doing more” looks like for a family. Senior living communities like Tuscan Gardens of Palm Coast, with Assisted Living and Memory Care options, are developed with family in mind. They create a warm and inviting sense of friendship and neighborliness among residents while encouraging families to visit as often as they'd like.

You do the most for your loved one when you take an honest look at what help is available and make the choice that will benefit them the most.

What can you do about the guilt of transitioning a loved one to a senior living community?

While guilt over moving a loved one into a senior living community is very common, it does not need to be permanent. With some effort in choosing the right community and self-compassion that allows you to forgive yourself and see the benefits of your decision, guilt can shrink from a huge burden to a manageable experience.

Look at the big picture

When deciding to move your loved one to a senior living community, the tension and worry over the unknown can overshadow the big picture of what everyone's life will look like once your loved one is settled into their community.

Try to zoom out and consider the solutions offered to you and your loved one by a senior living community. Instead of trying to wedge your loved one's medical care into your life between your own obligations, they'll have dedicated medical staff available in their own community and access to whatever healthcare you and they decide is best for them outside the community.

Instead of your loved one feeling that they need to ask for help every time they want to visit friends, enjoy a meal, or participate in local activities, these amenities are available right where they live.

You can trade in worrying about your loved one's safety while trying to manage your own life for knowing they're in a space created to keep them safe, all the while encouraging independence. At the same time, your loved one can stop living where they have to wait for support and instead start living in a community designed to keep them active and safe 24/7.

When you and your loved one look at the big picture of transitioning to a senior living community, you'll see that the benefits are great and that growing your loved one's network of support can only help them live a life they enjoy.

Connect with others who have already made the transition

Seeking out stories of family members who have already helped their loved ones move into senior living communities can ease the guilt of going through the same process yourself. There are so many stories in the world of aging loved ones who were struggling with a lack of socialization and a feeling of defeat in the face of changing abilities. They come to life when they're among peers in a community that offers them daily activities and engagement.

These stories can help put your mind at ease and encourage your loved one to consider the change as a real opportunity instead of an imposition.

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The most rewarding thing is the smiles that I see. When I listen, solve issues, and engage in the activities, the smiles and the accolades for the team are what make this job worth it, day in and day out.

– **Executive Director at
Tucan Gardens of Palm Coast**





Research and visit senior living communities

Being rigorous as you research senior living communities is the best way to ease your mind about the choice to move your loved one in. You'll want to look for a senior living community that provides multiple levels of care so your loved ones can receive the care they need and stay connected to their community as their needs change. You'll also want to make sure their medical needs can be met, and physical therapy and exercise are a priority to maintain the physical ability your loved one still has.

You'll also want to look for a community prioritizing nutritious and delicious meals and activities that help the residents live an interesting, connected life. A senior living community that values the legacy of each resident and plans events and excursions that add variety and fun to life is a community where aging is done differently, where aging is an experience of dignity, enjoyment, and care.

If you find that a senior living community isn't transparent about daily life or seems indifferent to its residents' well-being, it's best to politely decline and continue your search for a community that truly prioritizes its residents. Seek out a place where team members genuinely connect with and understand each resident as an individual. While amenities are an important factor, choosing a community that fosters these personal connections can significantly alleviate some of the guilt associated with moving a loved one. By doing thorough research and selecting a community that meets all their needs, you can feel confident that you've made the best choice for your loved one's new home.





Keep your loved one involved in the transition to senior living

Even if your loved ones are resistant to the change of moving into a senior living community, keeping them involved in the process will help ease them into the transition. When seniors feel their independence and value as an adult is respected, they become more open to change.

When you tour senior living communities, bring your loved ones along. Consider their opinions; if they notice the staff isn't as friendly in one community or the food looks better in another, remember that this place will be part of their everyday life, and add their opinion to the pros and cons list. It isn't certain that they'll fall in love with a particular community before moving there, but if there are glimmers of interest, take note.

Encourage your loved one to ask questions and see if you can add some of your own that you know will speak to their interests. Search for communities that offer an abundance of daily activities, allow pets, and offer delicious food options so your loved one can see that their interests and enjoyment of life will be a top priority.



Help your loved one as they navigate change

When your loved one has to make the big and small decisions that come with moving (and often downsizing), your help can be invaluable. With patience and loving care, you can help them sort through their lifetime of belongings to decide what they will bring along with them to their new home.

Encourage your loved one to keep mementos, possibly even helping them get photos framed and hung so they can feel surrounded by their friends and family. Help them make their new suite feel like home, making personal touches that show them that their life is simply continuing in a bright new space, not ending.

Help your loved one get oriented to their new home, introducing them to the team members and going with them as they get used to their new routine. Your comforting presence as they get settled can help them see you're still helping them and want to be a part of their life; you're just offering them more than you could when caring for them on your own.

Encourage connection

Connections can help add interest and enjoyment to life; your loved one has a lot to offer any community, and bringing their life experiences and legacy to a senior living community that values them as vital individuals is a great way to ensure they feel valued.

As you help them transition to senior living, encourage your loved one to connect with their neighbors. One of the greatest benefits of a senior living community is living with plenty of people around you in a similar season of life. There is abundant opportunity to live a sociable, satisfying life in a senior living community, especially one like Tuscan Gardens of Palm Coast, where daily group activities and delicious family-style meals are a part of residents' day, helping them maintain connections in their community.

Visit often to show your loved one you're still a part of their life

When looking for a senior living community, it's important to find one where visitors are welcome anytime. A community with a generous visiting policy is a community that knows seniors need to feel connected to the outside world to thrive. Senior living communities should also be equipped with technology like tablets and touchscreens that allow for calls, video chats, email, and chats to keep family close in seniors' hearts and minds even when they can't be physically close by.

When you commit to a regular schedule of visits or calls to your loved one, you let them know how important it is for them to be a part of your life. They will see that you are still invested in caring for them, you've just expanded their care team by transitioning them to senior living, and they can let go of fears of being abandoned or left behind. With that regular contact, you, too, can relax and release some of the guilt you may carry about this decision.





Take care of yourself

Caregiver burnout is a very real phenomenon, and you may still experience it even after your loved one moves to a senior living community. There are many ways caregivers can care for themselves, too; it may feel strange and selfish at first to prioritize yourself in a process where you only want to prioritize your loved one, but you can't pour from an empty cup.

Here are a few ways to ease your guilt over transitioning your loved one into senior living, and it's important to recognize that each of these steps works for you. So, as a final step, we'd like to encourage you to focus on yourself. Some self-care options include:

- Set aside time to rest and do activities you enjoy. Watch your favorite TV show, read a book, work on a Sudoku or Wordle puzzle, or anything that helps you take a breath and rest your busy mind.
- Find people to talk to. Seek out supportive friends and family members, or even consider working with a therapist so you have a safe space to vent. You're carrying a heavy load, and having a circle of empathetic people can help lighten that load.
- Give yourself some grace. If you notice you're feeling inadequate or being hard on yourself, take a deep breath, close your eyes, and remind yourself that you are a human, you are doing your best, and that's enough.
- Give yourself permission to let a few things slide. Go an extra day between laundry loads, or allow the lawn to grow a day or two more. Get takeout, or say "no" to planning an event. Take the time you'd use to do these chores and rest instead.
- Delegate. If there's someone you know who can help you with any of the steps in the process of transitioning your loved one to a senior living community, tell them you need help. You may be surprised at who steps up!



Established in 2011, Tuscan Gardens of Palm Coast provides assisted living, enhanced assisted living, and memory care. It offers a vibrant lifestyle complete with Signature Dining, Signature Programs, and a Signature Experience grounded in celebrating family, culture, and heritage. Located in sunny Palm Coast, Tuscan Gardens of Palm Coast is a place your loved one can call home, with all of the comforts you would expect from a luxury senior living community in Florida.