

7 Tips for Choosing Senior Housing

A FREE Guide from Lifesprk Housing Solutions

This FREE guide shares frontline expertise to help you and your parents find the 'best fit' senior housing in the Twin Cities

- Tips on how to tour to get the best 'look' at a community
- Understanding the funding and packaging options
- Questions you need to ask
- Common misconceptions



7 Tips for Choosing Senior Housing

Your mom is living alone and you're worried. Or perhaps your dad is newly widowed, and lonely in the big family home. Maybe your parent just had a health crisis and needs some support to live independently. There are many reasons that seniors and their families contemplate a move.

At Lifesprk Housing Solutions, we work with hundreds of seniors and their families every year to help them find their 'best fit' housing solution. We understand the challenges involved and how overwhelming the task can seem. We often hear from seniors and families that they unfortunately learned some lessons the hard way when they started out searching for senior housing on their own. We've also worked with families who have made a wrong move, and now are looking to fix it.

There is a lot to consider when looking for senior housing, and the complexity makes it all the more challenging when you consider the consequences of a wrong move. The key is to tap the knowledge of an expert to get support and information so you can make a good, informed choice.

Our goal with this special report is to share with you the lessons we've learned – from our own experience as well as from seniors and families with whom we work – to help you more easily and successfully start your search for your 'best fit' housing solution.

1. Examine every option, don't assume

Many families tell us: "I was told my parent needs to go to the nursing home," and so they begin looking for a skilled nursing facility. Today there are a staggering number of options available, including round-the-clock in-home care which may be priced comparably with the private pay costs of a nursing home. The best way to start your search efforts is to first get some help examining all your alternatives. One way to start is to set up a free Life Consultation from Lifesprk Housing Solutions to help you identify your options.

Lifesprk Navigators share the story of one family that thought they needed to find a nursing home bed for their mom whose memory and cognition were declining. Her husband desperately wanted to keep her at home, and the daughters were torn because with their jobs and families they knew they couldn't provide all the care that was needed. With some creative

planning and involvement from the two daughters as well as the combination of Lifesprk's unique Lifesprk Experience™ approach and private duty home care services, the family was able to keep her successfully at home for a lower cost than private pay nursing home.

An expert on finding 'best fit' housing solutions for seniors, Lifesprk Navigators know that every situation is different and deserves a full analysis to determine the best options for the individual senior and family involved.

2. Know what the priorities are for your mom

What's really important to your mom? Has she adamantly stated that she will not move anywhere without her cat? Is it important for her to remain in a familiar neighborhood where she can continue to go to the same pharmacy, grocery store, and hairdresser?

These questions help to define the type of community that will be a 'best fit' for your mother.

A critical step is to perform a comprehensive assessment or discovery of your parent's situation to identify both her needs and wants. This assessment will help you create a better profile of the type of community you should contact, eliminating wasted time and effort meeting with communities that don't meet your priorities and won't be a good solution for your mother.

Lifesprk Housing Solutions uses an assessment tool that examines the 7 elements of life to ensure that a robust and accurate picture of what your mom really needs and wants in a new home – everything from health and wellness to cognition and finances to purpose, passion and identity. What gets your

mom excited? Is she passionate about gardening? Cooking? Does she like to read? Those are just as important as questions about her health care needs and the level of support that is available.

Lifesprk Navigators note that many families start out with one list of priorities only to discover after a tour or two that their priorities shift. That's a normal part of the process.

3. Assisted Living communities are not just one-size-fits-all

Once you know your priorities, you can more easily match them to the communities that will be a best fit for you.

It is a common misconception that assisted living communities are all basically alike, and are just in different locations with different layouts. The reality is that assisted living communities come in many different varieties with different packaging, different funding options, and different levels of services and care. Beyond assisted living, there are also independent living, memory care, skilled nursing, and transitional care facilities. And some offer all of those in a single continuum of care. There are more than 400+ senior housing and community options in the Twin Cities metro region alone.

Lifesprk Navigators regularly tour properties and check with them on an ongoing basis to maintain Lifesprk's comprehensive database of communities throughout the region. Through that commitment to ongoing contact and touring, Lifesprk Housing Solutions staff know the properties and their personalities as well as their amenities and services. This knowledge can make identifying the 3-5 best options to explore much simpler and significantly less stressful. With the Lifesprk Housing Solutions database, Navigators can quickly pull a list of potential communities and then narrow that list even further by checking availability to give you a list of the top options for you.

4. How to tour to get the best "look" at a community

Touring is an essential step in choosing any new housing option, however, people often rush to get the touring done as quickly as possible. A common misstep is to tour several communities in one day. The problem is that then it is very easy to blur the facts and impressions of one option into another. Tours can also be very draining – emotionally and physically on your parent. You want your dad to be at his best and feeling good during the tour so he can experience the atmosphere, the people, and the community.

Lifesprk Navigators recommend that you space out your tours, plan just one or two in a day, and be sure to take a day or two in-between each tour day. She acknowledges that families are often in a crunch for time due to a health crisis or the need to quickly find an alternative to the current situation. That's why narrowing the list to just 3-5 'best fit' communities to tour is so helpful.

During the tour take notes and be sure to check the four S's:

- See – does what you see appeal to you?
- Smells – does it smell clean and nice?
- Sounds – are people out and about, do they sound happy?
- Smiles – look around, do you see smiling faces?

Ask to tour and have a complimentary lunch at the community. It is a great opportunity to try the food as well as to catch a glimpse of the "real day-to-day life" that occurs. A tour and lunch gives you a different perspective than a traditional tour, while providing an opportunity for you to sample the community life.

Another option at some communities is to spend an overnight. Some properties have guest suites that may be available for your parent to try out, which will give him a 24-hour slice of life in his potential new home.

5. Know the questions you should ask

Create a list of questions that you ask each community you consider. The usual questions are about room sizes, levels of care and support, and social activities. The right questions though elicit critical information that will help you make an informed decision. Lifesprk Navigators suggest adding some of the following to your list:

- How long have your management staff been here – on this campus? Working for this organization?
- What are some of the things that residents can't do here? (i.e., have alcohol, etc.)
- What are the staffing ratios?
- What financing options are there, including what types of coverage do you accept?

Spend some time really thinking about your parent and what's important to her in her daily lifestyle. For example, does your mom like to sleep in during the morning? If so, check about the daily routines at the community and the flexibility of morning breakfast schedules.

6. Get help having the conversation

There are many situations where the parent and family are at odds over the decision to move. Families worry about dad and grapple with how to have the conversation.

Parents may refuse to even discuss a move because they feel it means they are getting old, are giving up, and are no longer independent.

Lifesprk Navigators seen all different types of situations – from those where the various adult children may have different ideas on what needs to happen, to those where the parent will not talk with the family about moving. Often families think they have to go through these conversations alone and are surprised to learn that there is support available. In their roles at Lifesprk Housing Solutions, they serve as a neutral party who can help start the conversation as well as raise those difficult questions while helping the whole family to navigate their options.

The Lifesprk team frequently sees situations where people have misconceptions about what is available or how to best approach the search for new housing. It is such a relief to them to find, first, that there is someone who will help them from the very beginning, and second, who can help them at each step of the way. The approach we use at Lifesprk Housing Solutions is one that starts by doing an assessment to truly understand what the needs and wants are, and examining what options will even make sense. That process helps to get the entire family on board with a plan.

7. Understand the funding . . . and packaging

A common misconception about senior housing is that Medicare will cover it. Unfortunately, Medicare does not cover any portion of most senior housing options, with the exception of short-term rehabilitation in transitional care units or skilled nursing facilities. Senior housing is either private pay or covered by Medical Assistance waiver or long-term care insurance.

Some properties accept a limited number of Medical Assistance waivers, which have very specific criteria for eligibility

and often have waiting lists for those spots. Long-term care insurance may cover some aspects of senior housing depending upon the individual situation and policy.

A good question to ask when touring your top 3-5 ‘best fit’ senior housing options is what happens if your parent’s money runs out?

Senior housing campuses offer a myriad of packages and pricing options which can be very confusing if you are looking at more than a handful of potential communities. During a tour to worry less about the pricing and costs, and focus more on your priorities, the experience and whether it seems a match for your parent. Then when you’ve narrowed your choices to the top 1 or 2, it is easier (though still not simple) to compare apples to apples for the packages, services and pricing.

Bonus tip: Give the transition time – it won’t be perfect overnight

Once you move your parent, expect that it will be a gradual transition with some bumps in the road. Lifesprk team members regularly witness the tremendous emotional toll that a move takes on a parent, regardless of the situation surrounding the move. It is a major life transitional event that may prompt grief reactions. Lifesprk Navigators in their roles are often able to support seniors and families through the entire move process – from the first conversation through to a housewarming visit. Despite the fact that this premium service includes logistical support such as arranging the packing, coordinating the move, and every step in-between, she plays an equally vital role of emotional support to both the family and the parent.

People tell Lifesprk afterward that they had no idea what they were getting into, and are just so thankful for the support. They didn’t realize the time, effort and cascade of emotions they would face throughout this. Having someone like Lifesprk they can turn to with questions at any point gives them peace of mind and helps steer them in the right direction.

After the move, emotions will bubble over for a while and glitches are sure to happen – you can’t plan for absolutely every contingency. But knowing you made a thoughtful, informed choice using a thorough approach that focused on your parent’s needs *and* wishes goes a long way to helping to allay those bumps when they happen.



**Call today
to schedule your free
Life Consultation**

952-345-8770

Or email us at
ShineOn@lifesprk.com

Visit us online at:
www.lifesprk.com

About Lifesprk Housing Solutions

Lifesprk Housing Solutions was created to help you navigate the complex maze of housing and other community service options in the Twin Cities metro. Our Housing Solutions uses our personalized, unique Lifesprk Experience™ approach to identify the needs and wishes of people in the second half of life find the “best fit” housing solution.

We know the personality, reputation, costs, and availability of more than 400 local senior housing and care services in the Twin Cities market. Lifesprk coordinates the Housing Solutions services through partnerships with the best public and private organizations in the community.

Call today to find out more about our **free Life Care Consultation** that will give you:

- expert guidance to help you identify the “best fit” housing solutions for you,
- information on selected providers,
- coordination and communication with those providers,
- and ongoing phone support and consultation.

In addition, we offer a package of ongoing Life Care Management services to assist with all aspects of the transition.

Named a 2014 Top 100 Workplace by *Star Tribune* and 2009 Small Business Success Stories by *Twin Cities Business Magazine*, Lifesprk has been among the fastest growing companies in the region and the leading provider of Life Experience (a unique blend of geriatric care management and home care) in the metro, becoming a national catalyst to eliminate what we call the roller coaster of health care crisis.

Lifesprk's leaders have seen too many people in the second half of life on a roller coaster of crises robbing them of control, opportunity and independence. That's just not acceptable – the Lifesprk team has made it their passion to change that experience and build pathways to achieving people's goals, addressing any issues or concerns that may interfere.



Call Lifesprk today
to schedule
your **Free Life Consultation**
for Housing Solutions

952-345-8770

or email us at
ShineOn@lifesprk.com
visit: www.lifesprk.com

*“If it wasn’t for
the expert guidance
we received from
Lifesprk Housing
Solutions,
we’d be drowning
in our tears . . .”*

- Grateful daughter of Roger

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