



*Tips for Evaluating  
Memory Care from Different  
Vantage Points*

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## How to Ease the Memory Care Move

Caregivers and their loved ones with dementia are often not on the same page when it comes to evaluating and selecting a memory care community. While caregivers, such as adult children and spouses, want what's best for their loved ones, they may overlook what matters most to those with dementia.

Find out what's truly important to memory care residents to help them select the community that is right for them and settle in successfully.

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### Tours Can Be Tricky

Caregivers often bring their loved ones along for community tours hoping that they will fall in love with the place and want to make the move. However, this is an unrealistic expectation for many of those with dementia, as they may find the touring process overwhelming and confusing.

They may no longer have the critical thinking skills or the memory needed to evaluate one community with the next. If the caregiver feels good about a place, their loved one may sense his or her comfort and confidence and likely be content with the choice.

### Be Aware of Different Priorities

On the tour, caregivers typically like to see newer construction, elegantly decorated spaces and robust activity calendars. Those living with dementia, however, don't seem to notice or care about shiny, new finishes or planned activities. They, however, tend to react favorably to kind, loving people and an inviting, safe and comfortable environment.

### Feel the Warm Fuzzies

Pay attention to the community's team members, and see how they interact with the residents. Do they make eye contact? Smile? Speak in a friendly tone? Greet residents by name?

A person with dementia typically responds to other people's energy, warmth and sincerity. Mom doesn't care if the person interacting with her is a nurse, cook or CEO; she just knows if the person is kind and makes her feel at ease.

### Respect Routines and Rituals

A good understanding of a loved one's daily routine helps the memory care team deliver what they call "person-centered" care. Caregivers may be asked to map out dad's typical day hour-by-hour, so team members can create an environment that honors his everyday habits and rituals.

For example, if dad prefers to brew his own morning coffee and shower in the evening, then team members can help him follow the same schedule in memory care as well.

## **Familiarity Breeds Comfort**

When memory care residents are surrounded by familiar things, they feel more comfortable. From framed family photos to cranberry juice in the refrigerator to a set of keys on a ring, dad's favorite and familiar things should be easily accessible.

This goes likewise for mom. If she never left the house without lipstick, then she should have her favorite shade available to wear every day and a purse to keep it in, if that's what she's used to. These and other simple things, like carrying a cancelled checkbook, can help residents maintain a sense of control and identity.

Keeping to a familiar visiting schedule is also helpful. If the caregiver and person with dementia did not live together, then visit on the same schedule as was previously kept, whether it's twice a week or twice a day.

## **Re-Create Home**

Caregivers should resist the urge to buy new furniture, bedding and clothing for the move to memory care. Instead, furnish the space with familiar objects to re-create the feeling of home.

Those with dementia respond to the way things feel, like a familiar blanket and pillow, and the way things smell. Try using an air freshener with mom's favorite lilac scent. Have the room fully arranged prior to moving day to make the transition less stressful for the person with dementia.

## **Activities Vs. Programming**

Many people think that activities and programming are one in the same, but they are very different, especially in the realm of memory care. Activities *occupy* one's mind and body to create busy work, while programming *engages* one's mind, body and soul to meet psycho-social and spiritual needs.



*"People with dementia, like all people, have six psychological needs: attachment, love, comfort, identity, inclusion and occupation; and that as we care for people with dementia, we should strive to fulfill those needs every day."*

*~Tom Kitwood, author of "Dementia Reconsidered: The Person Comes First"*

Activities like crafts and games can offer an enjoyable way to pass time. Programming, on the other hand, offers an opportunity to do something fulfilling that gives the person a sense of purpose and meaning. This endeavor is unique to each person. Think about what nurtures mom's soul? Does a daily outdoor walk bring her meaning, or does she find her essence in the kitchen baking homemade pies?

One memory care resident, for example, derived his sense of identity and purpose from his athletic abilities and daily workouts, so each day he was escorted to the gym to exercise. This continuity with life at home gave him great joy and purpose.

## **History Matters**

In memory care, a great deal of emphasis is placed on understanding where a person with dementia is at today, but each resident's personal history helps create a whole picture of the person.

Team members typically gather information that includes details about: where the resident was born and raised, brothers and sisters, education, jobs, career, faith, hobbies, spouse and children. This background can help them find ways to connect with a person who has dementia in thoughtful and meaningful ways.

## **Care for the Caregivers**

The caregiver role continues even after the move to memory care. Caregivers can take comfort knowing that memory care team members are professionals who understand that personality and behavioral changes result from diseases that cause physiological changes in the brain. While team members provide focused attention of unconditional love, they cannot replace the love a family member gives.

Caregivers can show themselves love too by joining support groups. Sharing joys and concerns with other dementia caregivers can lessen the loneliness in this experience.



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