



PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING



Guide to Connecting with Community in Senior Living

The Importance of Connectedness
to Senior Health, and the Role
of Senior Living in Cultivating Relationships

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Introduction

For a number of reasons, from lack of transportation to a shrinking social circle, retirement sometimes results in seniors spending considerable time alone. Researchers say that can be bad for your mental and physical well-being. Isolation among older adults is associated with a broad range of significant health issues, including diabetes, depression, heart disease, and more.

While these concerns are serious, there are ways to prevent isolation.

One solution is to transition to a senior living community. These communities help provide a sense of connectedness, which is linked to a better quality of life for older adults.



Inside this Guide

As you plan for your future, it's important to keep in mind that where you live during retirement matters. It can impact your safety, health, and overall wellness. That's why many older adults choose to relocate to a senior living community. These communities offer a variety of benefits, from a safe environment to opportunities for friendship and socializing.

In this guide, we'll explore how to make the most of life after your move. You'll find tips for getting to know your new neighbors, joining resident activities, participating in resident leadership roles, and more.



Get to Know the New Neighbors

After retiring, older adults often find their social circle shrinking. Old friends may relocate to another city or state to be near their adult children. Relationships with former work buddies might drift apart once you no longer have daily contact.

The older you get, the tougher it can be to make new friends. Fortunately, senior living communities help change that. Residents often find they have much in common with one another. The environment provides both formal and informal opportunities to build bonds.

After your move, the first step to expanding your social circle is getting to know the new neighbors. A few suggestions to help you do that are:

Set a Goal to Put Yourself Out There

Moving to a new place, especially if you don't know anyone, can be a little daunting. It might be tempting to stick close to your own apartment or suite except at mealtimes. While that is understandable, if you don't get out more, it will no doubt take longer for you to make new friends and begin to feel at home.

Try to give yourself small goals for each day or week. For example, aim to meet two new neighbors each week. Maybe you could bake some cookies and take them with you as you knock on the doors closest to your apartment. Work your way down the hall until you've met everyone.

Host a Housewarming Party

Another suggestion is to host a housewarming party once you're mostly settled into your new place. You can invite old friends and family, as well as your new neighbors, and allow everyone to mingle. Keep it simple and serve punch and cookies—or talk with the dining services staff to see if you can order appetizers or desserts to serve.



A housewarming party has the added benefit of giving friends and family who haven't yet visited an opportunity to see your new home. Talk with the marketing or sales team to see if they might be able to offer tours to your loved ones so they can see all the community has to offer.

Greet and Welcome New Residents

Another way to slowly meet the neighbors is to personally welcome those who move in after you do. You know what it feels like to be the “new kid on the block,” and they'll likely appreciate being greeted by a friendly face.

Try writing a quick note with your name, phone number, and email to leave with each new resident. Invite them to call or email you if they need help settling in or would like to meet for a cup of coffee or a walk around the campus.



Explore Community Activities

One of the most popular aspects of moving to a senior living community is the opportunity to participate in life enrichment programs. Most communities offer a variety of programs and events to meet a wide range of interests.

Each community typically has a team of professionals who plan, organize, and host daily activities. They usually include both on-campus activities and outings to local and regional destinations. Residents are invited to join as many as they choose to each day. A couple of tips to make the most of the community's activity schedule include:



Talk with the Community's Life Enrichment Team

The best way to get started is to sit down with a member of the community's life enrichment team. Ask them to review the calendar of planned activities for the month with you. If you have questions or need more details about any of the activities, be sure to talk with the team member about it.

If there are hobbies or activities you enjoy that aren't part of the calendar, inquire about the process for requesting they be added. Most communities appreciate resident feedback, as it gives them an opportunity to expand the types of programs they offer.



Participate in a Variety of Planned Activities

We understand it can be a bit intimidating to join a group or gathering when you don't know anyone. If there are activities you'd like to take part in, but you're hesitant to do so alone, ask staff to introduce you to people who regularly attend. That can help you feel more comfortable as you are getting to know the neighbors.

Another option is to invite a friend or family member to come to the community and participate with you. It's a great way for them to learn more about your new home while also helping you ease into new activities.



Volunteer Your Time and Talent

[Volunteering during your retirement](#) years has proven health benefits. They range from avoiding the medical issues associated with isolation to giving seniors a greater sense of daily purpose. Research has even shown that people who volunteer live longer lives.

People sometimes hesitate to volunteer because they don't think they have any special skills to contribute. It's important to know that most organizations gladly train those who are willing to share their time.

When you move to a senior living community, you'll soon discover that volunteer opportunities abound. Whether you'd like to help out right within the community or work with a nearby organization, you'll likely find an option that suits you.

Here's what to consider when it comes to volunteering:

Get Involved in Opportunities at the Community

PSL communities rely on a host of [volunteers to enhance quality of life](#) for residents, families, and staff. In fact, in one year alone, volunteers donated more than 137,000 hours to help us create the warming, welcoming environment we're known for.

Volunteers can assist with tasks ranging from taking prospective new residents on tours to lending a hand with special events. The opportunities are diverse and plentiful.

Identify Other Opportunities to Lend a Hand

As you can imagine, PSL residents are actively engaged with a variety of organizations and clubs in the cities and towns surrounding the campus. Residents involved with group projects often bring back requests for help to their neighbors. These provide great avenues for meeting new people while also giving back to your off-campus neighbors.



Join Informal Gatherings

Because many residents have a lot in common, it usually doesn't take long for neighbors to become friends. While formal opportunities to volunteer and join community events are great avenues for expanding your circle of friends, many of the relationships formed in senior communities develop more casually.

By opening yourself up to new experiences, you'll soon discover how rich and full community life can be. Here are a few suggestions for gathering more informally:



Use Common Areas to Meet and Connect

Senior living communities often have common areas throughout the building where people gather informally, as well as places that people pass through during the day. You will likely find spending time in these spots to be a great avenue for meeting fellow residents.

For example, you could set a goal to hang out in these areas a couple of times a week. Take a cup of coffee or tea to the lobby or a common area near your apartment, along with a magazine or book, and find a comfortable place to sit. This will give you an opportunity to meet and chat with neighbors, visitors, and staff as they make their way around the community.



Look for Shared Hobbies

Another way to get more involved at your new residence is to explore informal hobbies your neighbors enjoy together. These can be a great way to bond and build friendships.

Think about how you like spending your time, and ask around to see who else shares your interests. Talk with the life enrichment team to see if they know which of your fellow residents you could connect with.

If you like taking a brisk walk every day, for example, you'll probably find a group who would welcome you. Or if you are a gardener, communities often have designated spaces or raised beds where residents can plant and nurture flowers and vegetables.



Find Fitness Buddies to Work Out With

No matter where you live, engaging in fitness activities is more fun with a friend. And people who work out with a friend tend to stick to it more faithfully. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, having a workout buddy keeps you more motivated and more consistent in pursuing your fitness goals.

In addition to offering scheduled fitness programs, such as chair yoga or stretching classes, many senior living communities have

exercise equipment or fitness centers. These are designed so that residents can make use of them at their convenience. This is another place where you have a chance to meet people, so take advantage of this amenity.



Take on Resident Leadership Roles

Because PSL values input and feedback from residents, families, and staff, we actively seek out people for leadership roles in our communities. For residents who call a PSL community home, these volunteer positions give them a voice in how decisions and policies are made.

By lending your time to a council or committee, you'll have a chance to get to know neighbors, staff, and other residents' family members. You can get started whenever you are ready:

Learn About Resident Council and Committees

You might find it easiest to join a resident committee or two and get to know how things work. Talk with the team at your local community to learn what opportunities are currently available. As you get more comfortable, assuming a leadership role on a committee or on resident council might be of interest to you.

Seek Out Other Ways to Get Involved

Senior living communities typically encourage residents to share their talents with their neighbors. If you play the guitar or piano, for example, you might want to offer to teach lessons. Or if you have good tech skills or a grandchild with a tech background, you could volunteer to teach a workshop on shopping online safely or a tutorial on how to set up and protect a Facebook page.



Encourage Loved Ones to Visit the Community

Finally, just because you've moved to a senior living community, don't think you have to leave your old friends and lifestyle behind. You'll probably be happier if they visit often and regularly attend events. And most communities welcome and encourage visitors.

If you aren't quite sure how to keep loved ones engaged, here are a few ideas:

Host Parties for Family and Friends

You might think you can no longer host family parties because your new space is smaller than your old house. That likely isn't true. Many communities allow residents to reserve spaces for private gatherings. So, you can still have the grandkids over for a movie night or craft party. Check with the team to see what options are available.

Celebrate Milestones with Old and New Friends

The same holds true for important birthdays, anniversaries, and other milestones. Don't let a perceived lack of space hold you back from hosting events for loved ones. You can also take advantage of community spaces to celebrate with friends you make at your new home. Work with the staff on ideas for where you might host events on campus, and what you'll serve. The dining services team may be able to help.





Conclusion

Having trusted friends you can relate to will provide you with a support system that makes it easier to navigate life's ups and downs. This is important at every age, but it's especially true as we grow older. From encouraging us to exercise to lending an ear when times are tough, friends play an essential role in our quality of life and even our longevity.

Schedule a Visit to a PSL Community

When you make a move to a senior living community, you'll find the opportunities to expand and maintain your circle of friends are plentiful. We invite you to call a Presbyterian Senior Living community near you to learn more and schedule a personal visit.



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Community List**