

The Emotional Transition to an Independent Living Community

*A Guide to Thriving
in Your New Home*



PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING



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Introduction

Let's face it. Moving can be tough at any stage in life. For most people, it is both mentally and physically exhausting. The transition to a new place asks us to give up the old and welcome the new. And as we grow older, adjusting to major changes may take longer.

For an older adult who has, as is often the case, lived in the same house for many years, moving presents emotional challenges. The sentimental attachment to a home, especially if it's where they raised a family, might make a senior reluctant to make a move. Even for those who believe the transition to an independent living community is the start of an exciting new chapter in life, leaving a house full of memories behind can be emotional.

Inside this Guide

Moving is rated as one of life's major stressors. It ranks right up there with the death of a loved one and losing your job. The unique challenges that moving presents for seniors led the medical community to create the diagnosis of relocation stress syndrome (RSS). The symptoms can include anxiety and sadness. So, if you or an older family member are struggling, even if you want to make a move, know that you aren't alone.

Inside this guide, we'll share the steps you can take to ease the transition. From planning ahead to preparing for a few bumps, this guide will help ensure you start to thrive in your new home as quickly as possible.



Set Reasonable Expectations

One of the first tips we can share for making a smooth transition to independent living is to establish realistic expectations right from the start. That includes creating a timeline for downsizing and moving that doesn't overwhelm you and the loved ones who are helping you.

It also means utilizing the resources available to you, such as the community's sales team. At PSL communities, for example, team members have experience helping new residents create detailed transition plans. Be sure to inquire at the community you are moving to about what services and support they offer.

A few more suggestions you might find useful include:

- **Create a realistic moving/downsizing plan:** If you've lived in your home for any length of time, chances are good you've acquired a lot of possessions. Sorting through them, figuring out what to keep and what to donate, and finding new homes for family treasures can take time and patience. Using the PSL [Designing for Downsizing Checklist](#) may make this part of the relocation process a little easier and a lot less stressful.
- **Consider hiring relocation professionals:** One more option for helping make this transition go more smoothly is to hire a senior move manager. These professionals help with everything from creating a floor plan for your new apartment or villa to packing and sorting, hiring a moving company, and unpacking once you've made the move. Ask the staff at the community you are transitioning to if they partner with a senior move manager. PSL sales teams will be able to offer you a few suggestions. If the community you are moving to doesn't have established relationships, the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM) can be a resource.



Get Involved at the Community Before Moving Day

Transitioning from a private residence to an independent living community can feel like a big change. That's especially true if you don't know anyone who already lives there. By getting involved in community life before you move in, you'll feel more comfortable when the big day arrives. It will help you not only meet the neighbors ahead of time, but also learn to find your way around the community.

Talk with the team to identify ways to visit on a regular basis before moving day, such as:

- **Attend events and activities:** One of the most popular features of an independent living community is the rich variety of daily activities and events. PSL communities host activities every day, ranging from art classes to wellness programs. Residents can join as many—or as few—as they choose to each day. Take a look at the resident calendar and identify a few programs that sound interesting. Then talk to staff about participating.
- **Meet the new neighbors:** Ask the sales team member you are working with if they can introduce you to the people who will be your new neighbors. They are probably as eager to meet you as you are to meet them! Maybe you can have coffee together a time or two prior to your moving day.

A man with a white beard and a straw hat is taking a photo with a vintage camera. The background is a blurred outdoor scene. In the top left corner, there is a close-up of a set of keys with a white keychain.

Bring Memories with You

Before you begin downsizing and removing anything, take a walk around your house and yard. Give yourself time to reminisce about all the milestones that happened there. And think about ways you can bring memories of your old place with you when you move.

- **Take photos of favorite spaces:**

Wander around your house and take photos and videos of your favorite spots. Don't forget to include outdoor places, too. It could be your garden, an old tree, or even the view at sunset you don't want to forget. Just be sure to capture what you love most about your home.

- **Memorialize the old home:** If you aren't particularly tech savvy, enlist the assistance of someone in your life who is. Ask for help creating a digital calendar or a fun video that combines photos of the home with activities you enjoyed there. The idea is to find ways to remember your past as you prepare for a new chapter in life.

A woman with grey hair, wearing a teal top and a light-colored cardigan, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a dark blue folded garment in her hands. In front of her is an open, dark-colored suitcase. The background is a bright, out-of-focus interior space with a window. A teal horizontal bar is at the top of the page.

Plan for Moving Day Success

One more tip for starting your move on a positive note is to give some thought to your actual moving day. With careful planning, you will likely be able to avoid any major mishaps:

- **Pack an essentials suitcase:** Make sure to pack a suitcase with those items you will need on moving day or the day after. Include necessities such as medications, a change or two of clothes, pajamas, toiletries and personal care items, important paperwork, and financial documents. A box filled with other essentials such as Kleenex, the coffee pot/supplies, and toilet paper will also be helpful.
- **Line up friends and family to help:** Even when you hire professional movers, the day will go more smoothly if you have a few people you trust helping you. For example, if you have a dog or cat who will be moving with you, ask someone to keep track of them for the day. Maybe ask a friend to bring lunch or a hearty snack.



Invite and Encourage Visitors

As you are settling into your new home, it might help you feel more connected to your old friends and family if you invite them to your new place. A few ways to do that are:

- **Extend dinner invitations:** Talk with the dining services team to learn the process for having friends and family join you for a meal. Then extend invitations to those you'd like to have come by for lunch or dinner.
- **Invite loved ones to attend programs:** Another way to encourage friends and family to visit is to invite them to a program on a topic they might be interested in. It will help them feel more comfortable stopping by for future visits, too.
- **Host a housewarming:** One more fun idea is to host a housewarming. You can invite family, friends, and new neighbors. If you need help with food, talk with the community's dining services staff. They'll likely be able to offer assistance.



Be Kind to Yourself

Our final piece of advice is to be kind to yourself during this transition. You'll likely find yourself experiencing a rollercoaster of emotions:

- **Expect some bumps as you settle in:**

Despite careful planning, there will be bumps along the way. That applies not only to the moving process itself, but also to the days and weeks after you are unpacked and settled in. This is an adjustment, so it's important to give yourself time.

- **Be mindful of relocation stress**

syndrome: Moving can be one of life's major stressors, especially during your senior years. Experts refer to the emotional ups and downs it causes as relocation stress syndrome. When you feel yourself doubting your decision, call a friend or stop over to visit a new neighbor or even a staff member for support.

Conclusion

At PSL communities, we offer [independent living in a variety of settings](#), whether as part of a life plan community, in one of our senior rental apartments, or in our affordable senior housing.

We encourage you to explore the options and set up a time to visit a PSL location near you!



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