

Does Mom Need More Help?

15 Signs to Watch For and the Questions to Ask Before Choosing Assisted Living

Built from 11 years of direct assisted-living experience.

Lavender Fields Assisted Living — Morgantown, West Virginia



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Before You Make a Decision

I spent 11 years working with older adults and their families. I learned that a sudden decline does not always tell the whole story.

Sometimes a family needs assisted living. Sometimes they need better information, additional support, or time to understand what changed.

This guide helps you put the pieces on one table before making a permanent decision.

Although the title says "Mom," this guide works for any parent, relative, spouse, or older adult.

Use this guide in three steps:

The goal is not to make the decision for your parent. The goal is to make the decision with them whenever possible.

01

Complete the "What Changed?" timeline.

02

Ask your parent what they want.

03

Take the healthcare and tour questions with you.



Fifteen Signs Mom May Need More Support

- Missed, duplicated, or confused medications
- Falls, near-falls, or new difficulty walking
- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Weight loss, skipped meals, or spoiled food
- Changes in bathing, dressing, or personal care
- A home that has become unsafe or difficult to manage
- Missed bills, appointments, or important telephone calls
- New confusion, forgetfulness, or poor judgment
- Isolation or loss of interest in usual activities
- Difficulty using the stove, appliances, or telephone
- Increased fear, anxiety, agitation, or withdrawal
- Driving accidents, dents, getting lost, or unsafe decisions
- Frequent emergency-room visits or hospital stays
- A spouse or family caregiver who is exhausted
- A growing need for help during the night

☐ *A checked box does not automatically mean assisted living is required. A checked box means the change deserves attention and a conversation.*



What Changed, and When?

Record the changes you have noticed:

Change noticed	Date it began	Sudden or gradual	What was happening at the time	Who else noticed

As you fill in the table, consider:

- Was there a recent illness, infection, fall, hospitalization, medication change, major loss, or move?
- Did the change begin suddenly?
- Has the change improved, stayed the same, or become worse?
- Has a healthcare professional evaluated the change?

 **Before the next appointment:** Bring this page to medical appointments. Do not stop or change medications without speaking with the appropriate healthcare professional.



What Help Does Mom Need Today?

Daily area	Handles independently	Needs reminders or some help	Needs full assistance
Bathing			
Dressing			
Grooming			
Toileting			
Walking and transfers			
Eating and meal preparation			
Medication management			
Transportation			
Shopping			
Housekeeping			
Laundry			
Paying bills			
Using the telephone			
Safety during the night			
Social connection			

Reflection: Which three areas create the greatest safety concern or caregiver strain?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



What Does Mom Want?

Sit down together. Ask. Listen. Write her answers in her own words.

What matters most to you about where you live?

What parts of your current routine do you want to protect?

What help would make life easier?

What type of help feels uncomfortable or unwanted?

Who do you trust to help make decisions?

What are you most afraid of losing?

What would help you feel safe?

Would you prefer help at home, a smaller residential setting, or a larger community?

What would make a new place feel like home?

What do you want your family to understand?

Safety matters. So do identity, privacy, choice, routine, relationships, and purpose.



Questions for Healthcare Providers

Print this page and bring the worksheet from the "What Help Does Mom Need Today?" card with you.

- Could a new or worsening medical problem explain this change?
- Have medications or dosages changed recently?
- Could medication interactions or side effects be contributing?
- Are any follow-up appointments, tests, or evaluations needed?
- Have hearing, vision, pain, sleep, hydration, nutrition, or mobility been evaluated?
- What activities can my parent manage safely?
- What assistance is recommended?
- Is the change expected to improve, remain stable, or progress?
- Which warning signs require urgent attention?
- Which community services or therapies should we explore?

Questions we still need answered



Compare the Support Options

	Support from family and friends	Paid help at home	Adult day or community services	Assisted living
Hours of support available				
Overnight availability				
Medication assistance				
Meals				
Transportation				
Personal care				
Social connection				
Home maintenance				
Emergency response				
Monthly cost				
Reliability				
Effect on family caregivers				
Parent's preference				

☐ *The cheapest option on paper is not always the most sustainable option. Include unpaid family time, missed work, transportation, home maintenance, and caregiver exhaustion in the comparison.*



Questions About Staffing, Care and Communication

Ask these questions during your assisted-living tour.

- Who is present during the day, evening, and overnight?
- How many residents does each staff member support?
- How long have the administrator and direct-care employees worked here?
- How does the community handle falls, medication concerns, and changes in condition?
- How and when will the family be contacted?
- What happens when a resident's needs increase?
- Under what circumstances must a resident move or be discharged?
- How are complaints handled?
- Can families visit without making an appointment?
- What does a typical overnight shift look like?
- How does the community preserve privacy, dignity, and personal choice?

Answers or concerns we want to revisit



Questions About Cost and Daily Life

Continue these questions during your assisted-living tour.

- Which services are included in the monthly rate?
- Which services cost extra?
- How and when can rates change?
- May we review the residency agreement before making a decision?
- How are meals adjusted for preferences or dietary needs?
- What activities reflect the residents' actual interests?
- Can we speak with current residents or families?
- How does the community help a new resident adjust?
- What personal belongings and furniture can residents bring?
- How are transportation and outside appointments handled?

What did we observe, apart from what we were told?



Tour Observation Notes

These notes record your family's impressions. They are not a medical or regulatory rating.

What we observed	Comfortable	Unsure	Concerned
Residents appeared known by name	☐	☐	☐
Staff spoke respectfully	☐	☐	☐
The building smelled clean and neutral	☐	☐	☐
Residents appeared appropriately dressed and cared for	☐	☐	☐
Staff responded when residents needed help	☐	☐	☐
Meals looked appealing	☐	☐	☐
The environment felt calm	☐	☐	☐
Private information remained private	☐	☐	☐
Doors, walkways, and common areas appeared safe	☐	☐	☐
The answers about fees were clear	☐	☐	☐
The answers about staffing were direct	☐	☐	☐
The community felt residential rather than institutional	☐	☐	☐

What felt right?

What concerned us?

What needs a second answer?

What did Mom say after the tour?

