

Senior Focus

TRANSITIONS

Last month I talked about alternatives to living in your home and this month I want to talk about transitioning to a different environment.

If you have ever moved you know how difficult it is, even if it is an anticipated move. Imagine you are sitting at home and someone, either a family member or friend, comes and says that “we” are going to move to a new place. You are told you will have help to get your clothes together and you can take a few mementos. How do you think you would respond? This scenario happens all the time when someone needs to move because of an inability to care for oneself or a loved one can no longer care for the person in the present environment. What can be done?

It usually does not suddenly happen that you can no longer take care of all of your or your loved one’s needs in your current location. It generally happens over time and one slowly becomes aware that things no longer function as smoothly as they did in the past. The logistics of moving and all that entails takes a lot of planning, but it also can cause a lot of stress, appropriately called *relocation stress syndrome (RSS)* Mallick & Whipple, 2000. A lot of times it is just easier to put it out of your mind, but avoidance will not help the situation.

It is important if you are the care giver to assess the situation and if necessary, physically write down the pros and cons of keeping things the way they are or moving your loved one to a more suitable environment. And if you are the one being care for, honestly look at the situation from your caregiver’s perspective as well as your own. However, it is not always possible for the one being cared for to adequately assess the situation due to physical conditions which have affected the thought process. That is why it is important to involve other family members or friends in this process.

It might be helpful to visit some of the options available to you as places to consider, should the need arise. Don’t wait until it is an emergency and all of a sudden your loved one needs placement. Moving will be stressful enough, but if you carefully think things through and plan it out, although still difficult, it will relieve some of the stress and guilt that is felt by all those involved in this decision.

Talking and planning for the future is so important. You talked with your children or friends when starting a new school year; about plans for a college or career; about getting married – where to have the ceremony, who would perform the services and where you were going to hold the reception; and about the birth of a child. You made plans for your retirement – how would you finance it, where would you live, what were you going to do? So why not plan for this next stage of life?

Once the decision has been made as to where to go, start talking about planning for the move. What would look nice in the room? What pictures could be hung? What clothes should be taken? Consider taking with you anything that helps the room look more like the home you know, and that will fit into the room.

Talking with others and having a voice in the decision makes it easier for all involved. It will not remove the “butterflies” in your stomach, the sense of guilt or loss, or wondering if you are truly doing the right thing. But it will relieve some of the stress. And as for the other emotions that are involved with these decisions, talk with a counselor or social worker who have worked with others in your situation. It is not something to be ashamed of to admit that you need help. We all need help at some time, so take advantage of the expertise of others.