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**Tips for finding the best suited Senior Living Community for your loved one:**

1. **Know What You Need.** Make an objective list of services and support needed – both current and anticipated. Maintaining independence, getting help with bathing and dressing, managing medication, maximizing safety – knowing upfront what’s needed can help define budget and choice.
2. **Establish a Budget.** How much can be spent on senior living each month? Many of your current homeowner expenses will be included in monthly fees – meals, utilities and taxes, for example. And as you’re planning, be mindful of other financial resources that can help, such as long-term care insurance, or the Aid & Attendance benefit for veterans and their surviving spouses. Don’t overlook any resources that can help you and your family.
3. **Determine a Location.** The real estate mantra – location, location, location – applies. Is it meaningful to stay close to the current neighborhood? Is being close to a major medical center important? Or is a move in order to reposition your loved one for the sake of adult children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren?
4. **List Non-Negotiables.** What are the “must-have” services and amenities? Your list should include whatever is non-negotiable in making this move – a community that accepts pets or offers a comprehensive wellness program, for example. You should also create a “wish list” of everything hoped for, such as an on-site guest suite for visiting family members, a fitness center with pool or all day dining.
5. **Read Online Reviews.** Find a community you’d like to know more about? Check Caring.com, SeniorAdvisor.com and even Angie’s List for reviews that can tell you what current and previous residents and families have to say about the community you’re interested in.
6. **Ask Around.** Anyone who’s been through the process – whether it was for themselves or on behalf of a loved one – can usually offer helpful insights. Similarly, you can often find good information and advice from a trusted family physician or clergy member. Ask friends, family, colleagues – and you may discover ideas you haven’t thought about … and information you need to know.
7. **Go Visit.** An in-person visit pays huge dividends when it comes to making an informed decision. Here’s what to watch for: How do residents and staff interact? What’s the mood of the community? Are residents actively engaged, sitting quietly or out of sight? Do you see safety features such as handrails, grab bars and emergency call systems? Is it clean? Is there an odor? Does it feel like a place you could call home? Are you greeted promptly and with friendliness? Ask questions and take notes – and consider bringing along a friend or relative so you can join forces to observe everything.

 8.**Review and Revisit.** After completing the initial round of community visits, review your notes and observations. Narrow your list a little more by identifying which communities are good options and which you’d like to eliminate. Schedule a new round of visits to your shortened list of communities, making sure you return to each community at a different time than your last visit, and drop in without an appointment in the evening and on a weekend.

1. **Rate Increases.** Ask what the rates have been historically, and ask for a cap to be written into the contract.

10.**Staff to Resident Ratio.** For anything other than Independent Living, it is important to know what their staff to resident ratio is, and what happens when there is a call out. Is there staff 24 hours/day? What is their training/certification?

11.**Emergeny Plan.** Does the community have a generator? Ask to see a copy of the Emergency Evacuation Plan.

12.**Have a Meal**. The dining experience is a critical piece of the puzzle. You should be offered to have a meal as their guest, but if not, ask. Also ask to sit with current residents, without the sales person present.It is ideal to have your loved one with you for this meal.

13.**Respite/Trial Program.** Some communities offer a free trial stay in their guest suite, so that your loved one is able to get a better feel of how they may like it there. If they don’t have a guest suite, you should still ask for your loved one to be able to spend the day there, eating meals and participating in activities.

14.**Employee Training.** Ask how often employees are trained, what incentive plans are in place for them, and what the turnover rate is.

15.**Consult a Professional.** Seek professional advice. Don’t go it alone … mistakes here can be very expensive, both financially and emotionally. Senior Living contracts can be long and complicated. Make sure you understand the ins and outs of everything ***before*** you sign anything.