

How to involve your parent in touring (without overwhelming them)

As an adult child of an aging parent, you're preparing for a major milestone: supporting their transition into senior living. Take a moment to appreciate just how monumental of a task that is, not just on a practical level, but also an emotional one.

The fact that you're here, reading this, shows just how deeply and genuinely you care for your parent(s), and how committed you are to ensuring top-tier care for their next adventure. Kudos to you for being involved and doing your due diligence, and for trusting us to help guide you along the way.

How can you involve your parent in touring senior living communities without overwhelming them (and yourself)? *Should* you involve your parent in touring at all? And if you decide to, how can you make the process as seamless as possible for everyone?

Read on for the answers to these questions, sourced from real adult children who've been in your shoes and walked a similar path.

But first, should you involve your parent in the tour?

Before we share our tips for involving your parent, you may be debating whether to include them at all. While the right answer to this question will look different for every family, generally, you'll want to consider whether your parent is willing or able to:

- Participate meaningfully in the tour
- Make decisions about their own care independently
- Move into a senior living community (including their openness to changing their mind should the right spot coming along)

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Disclaimer: Information provided above may vary by community. We encourage you to speak directly with each Senior Living community to confirm specific details and ensure the community is the right fit for your individual needs and preferences.

If you're still undecided after exploring these 3 abilities, know that's perfectly normal. Our related article "Should You Involve Your Parent in Touring?" can guide you further. Otherwise, read on for our top tips on how to involve your parent in touring.

9 tips for involving your parent in touring senior living communities

1. Put yourself in your parent's shoes

This is our first tip because it's such an important step not just for touring, but also for navigating this phase of life with confidence and compassion.

As an adult child, this transition is already draining and emotional for you. But it's important to practice empathy for your parent, too. How would you feel if you were the one moving into a senior living community? Even if it was the perfect place that ticked all the boxes? Really imagine it, and try to connect with those emotions.

This exercise can help you understand your parent better and get ahead of some common touring pains. There's a fine line here, though — how you'd feel in this hypothetical scenario might not match how your parent feels about their real-life circumstances. As well as considering what you know about them, invite your parent to share how they feel with you, which leads to our next tip.

2. Talk to your parent throughout the process

It may seem obvious, and while it sounds simple, these conversations are rarely easy. Our top tip for communicating with your parent openly and honestly: don't be afraid to ask questions. Remember, no matter who you're talking to (whether it's your parent, a resident, or a staff member), there's no such thing as a "dumb" question about senior living.

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If you need ideas or don't know where to start, here are a few things you should discuss with your parent throughout the process of touring:

- What they expect from their ideal senior care community
- How they're feeling about the transition
- Their preferred days and times to tour
- What counts as a red flag or deal-breaker to them
- The role they expect you and other family members to play in coordinating their care

3. Identify what's overwhelming

What, exactly, about this process is overwhelming to your parent and your extended family? Exploring the root causes of your emotions can reveal genuine issues that may need addressing, as well as ways each family member can support each other.

Try to avoid assumptions as best you can, on both sides. Something that feels easy or inconsequential to you could be a major stressor for your parent, or vice versa.

4. Let your parent set the pace

The point of touring is to find a place that's suitable and comfortable for your parent, so follow their lead.

Think of it this way: your family is a team, your parent is the hero, and you're their sidekick. For as long as it's safe, your parent gets the final word on any decisions regarding their care. But, like any good hero, your parent should also listen to the family's concerns with an open mind and heart, too.

Another way to prevent overwhelm and friction is to work from a place of deep respect for your parent's autonomy and independence. Always consult your parent before taking over a task or offering help that you assume they need, but they didn't explicitly ask for.

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If you're helping with the logistics and scheduling tours on your parent's behalf, make sure your bookings align with your parent's routines as well as your own. Avoid packing too many tours or appointments into a short period, if you can. And if your parent decides to cancel or reschedule, respect their wishes and try again later.

5. Focus on the positives

While the transition to senior living naturally involves tricky emotions, there are plenty of silver linings, too. From the peace of mind that comes with knowing your parent is cared for to seeing them grow, thrive, and live life on their own terms in an environment designed for them, senior living has lots of benefits the whole family can look forward to.

This doesn't mean avoiding any discussion of the "negatives" or embracing "toxic" positivity (where everything is perfect all the time). Preparing well for this stage of life requires frank conversations about the cons as well as the pros. But highlighting the positives can help a lot when it comes to turning overwhelm into confidence.

6. Tell your family how you can support

Once you've talked to your parents and explored your emotions, get clear about what you're able and willing to do to support your parent.

Will you help them choose communities to tour, communicate with staff, and book each visit? Will you attend tours with them? Will you help plan and attend fun activities before and after each tour to help the family unwind?

These "extra" duties can be an overwhelming part of the process and an obvious way for you to take some stress off your parent's plate. But you also have your own busy life — be realistic about what you can take on, and work with your parent to get on the same page.

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7. Make an adventure out of it

Any small gesture that shows you appreciate your parent can help them feel more empowered to make the transition.

If you're traveling out of town, why not take an extended weekend to explore the city with your family? Planning some of your parent's favorite activities is sure to win you a few favor points, too.

Your "adventure" doesn't have to be extravagant, of course. If you're touring locally or you'd prefer to keep things low-key, treat your parent to something nice or unexpected: a coffee at their favorite cafe, a walk at the local park, a bit of retail therapy.

Whatever you decide, your parent is sure to appreciate any opportunity to make precious memories with their family while preparing for the move.

8. Encourage them to ask questions and engage during the tour

How keen will your parent be to participate in the tour? Knowing the answer to this question can help you get ahead of so many potential hiccups. There are all sorts of reasons why your parent might hesitate to really get involved — from those standard big emotions that come with senior care to their own shyness, indifference, or self-esteem.

Things get especially complicated when a parent is in denial about the state of their care, or when they expect you (or another family member) to bear the brunt of the burden. Persuading your parent to be involved will likely be harder in these situations, but it's not necessarily impossible.

If you are in a place where you're having to encourage your parent, try to reframe any projections, assumptions, and even uncomfortable truths on your part as questions. For example, even if your parent genuinely can be stubborn at times, try reframing it as a question instead: "Can you share more about what you're resisting and why? I genuinely want to understand how you're feeling."

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9. Be willing to compromise

Every member of the family will have different ideas about what's best for your parent. While the transition will impact the whole family, your senior parent is the most affected by a long way. Which means their needs and preferences should come first.

Likewise, if you have legitimate concerns about your parent's preferred choice, be sure to communicate those before the proverbial ink dries.

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