

## Admission Trauma

It is not easy to move into a long-term care centre. It's a difficult decision that often comes at a time in people's lives when they have suffered many losses, such as declining health or the death of a spouse. The resulting loss of well-being and self-confidence makes it even more difficult to adjust to a new place to live.

Moving can be traumatic for anyone, but the elderly are especially vulnerable. The stress experienced from change and loss may push an older person into a state of emotional upset or depression. Also, family and friends may react to the move with understandable pain and grief.

However, new residents, their families and staff can do a lot to reduce this kind of stress.

Moving into a long-term care centre is a three-part process: preparing for the change, moving in, and settling in. Each stage offers opportunities for families and friends to help new residents adjust.

### Preparing for the Change

- Involve the person in decisions that help to maintain a sense of control. For example, encourage your older relative to choose personal items to take to the home, or make up a list of people who would like to know the new address.
- Talk openly about the upcoming move. Many families are themselves upset about the change, so they avoid talking about it. But older people need to talk, and need to know what to expect. They especially need reassurance that while the move itself may be difficult and life will be different, the support, love and understanding of family and friends will always be there.
- Focus on the positive. Talk about the programs, activities and companionship available at the long-term care centre. Remind your loved one that health and independence may even improve because of the care provided. But lend a willing ear to feelings of fear, sadness and anger, too —your relative has a right to express what's inside.

### Moving In

- On moving day, bring favourite items such as pictures and knickknacks to decorate the room and make it feel more like home. Bring a television or radio, and a comfortable chair (check available space first).
- Make sure your relative has enough clothing, especially underclothes, stockings or socks, and grooming products. People feel better able to cope when these items are in good supply.
- Talk to the long-term care centre staff about your family member's likes, dislikes, routines and any other information that will help them make the person feel more comfortable. Introduce yourself and your relative to other residents.
- Visit often, especially during the early days and weeks. Your presence provides invaluable reassurance and support.

### Settling In

- Adjusting to the new environment can take from six weeks to six months. You can help by encouraging your family member to make friends and get involved in home activities. Families might consider joining in some social and recreational activities at the home.
- Continue to visit regularly, and encourage other family members and friends to do the same. Attend the care conference that staff will schedule for your relative.
- Encourage your family member to continue making decisions and maintaining a sense of control wherever possible, no matter how seemingly insignificant the opportunity.

If you feel anxious about any aspect of your family member's care or adjustment to life in the long-term care centre, talk to the staff. They will be able to give valuable advice and support.