



Overcoming Difficult Relationships When Considering Assisted Living

By Janice Martin, Senior Living Specialist

Family relationships can be tricky – especially when it comes time to consider assisted living.

It's not uncommon to have blended families with adult children from both sides. When the step-parent's children are making decisions, the other side of the family may feel as though decisions are being made without them. Often, I have heard that the side of the family I was helping felt that the other side was resisting because they were spending the other's inheritance. I think it goes without saying that it has the potential to be pretty nasty.

I cannot stress enough how important communication is. You may not like the other family members but I urge you to put away any negative feelings and focus on what is most important – making sure your loved one is safe and well taken care of. And that the one providing care is supported and cared for as well.

I caution you to not text or email during this time. Too much can be read into the written word. You may believe you are coming across as kind and working in everyone's best interest, but it can be completely misconstrued. Pick up the phone and call! Schedule a convenient time when everyone is available and talk to one another by phone or Zoom. It will make all the difference in the world.

If you find that you are unable to come to an agreement with all parties involved, you may want to consider the services of an outside mediator. This person is an unbiased third party who has no relation to any side. They will listen impassively and suggest solutions that are beneficial.

What if you are the only relative of someone who has abused you or hurt you?

It doesn't have to be a parent. It could be an aunt, uncle, cousin, brother, or sister, and there is no other family left. If you are now in this position and need to make decisions for that person, this can be a terrible time for you. Make a list of the things that need to be done. Do what is necessary and move on to the next item that needs to be addressed. Stay focused on the goal and try to remain impartial.



What if you are divorced from your spouse but are still their power of attorney?

I had two situations where the wife, who was power of attorney, wanted nothing to do with her ex-husband. **Wife #1** shared with me that she had no intention of ever visiting him once he moved in and was going to simply walk away. I explained to her that as power of attorney, she had agreed to certain responsibilities for him. She did not ever have to see him again, but it was her responsibility to make payments for him from his funds and to make medical decisions for him.

Wife #2 had the benefit of having her ex-husband's brother as a second person listed as power of attorney. In this circumstance, she was no longer willing to fulfill her legal duties and left the responsibility to her brother-in-law. She could check in with him if she wished to or completely walk away.

You may be surprised to learn that there are professional power of attorneys and guardians who can make decisions for your loved one. A professional guardian is assigned by the courts and will take care of all medical and financial decisions. They will go to doctor visits, pay bills, buy clothing and personal items, and visit on a regular basis. They must appear before the court and report for everything they do and account for what money is being spent.

In order to obtain guardianship, the person must be deemed incompetent. To do this, two doctors must sign a document agreeing to this. If your goal is to

have them go to general assisted living, be sure to check the community's protocol since once deemed incompetent there is the possibility they must go to memory care.

It is critical to get power of attorney papers in place before a crisis, especially if you are helping an individual with dementia. In order to have power of attorney signed, your loved one must understand what they are signing. If they are unable to do this, then a guardianship must be assigned. This is very time consuming and detailed records must be kept and presented to the court on a regular basis. It is far better to be named power of attorney than guardian.

As a senior living specialist, I have helped many families experiencing difficult relationships to remain focused on the goal of finding a safe assisted living for their loved one. For more information, please contact me at Senior Liaison of Central Florida at 352-477-1866, SeniorLiaisonCFL@gmail.com, or visit www.SeniorLiaisonCFL.com.

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