



# How Would YOU Choose an Assisted Living Community?

By Janice Martin, Senior Advisor / Family Liaison



**W**hen faced with the prospect of choosing an assisted living community, there are several options of how to begin. As a former Director of Sales in senior living, I met with countless families who had never visited a community before and knew nothing about what to look for or what questions to ask. When I asked them how they found my community, I was often told, “we were driving by and saw your sign.” THAT was how they chose a community to visit! I would ask them what was important to them in their search. The answer was often the same... safety and care.

But what does that mean? How is safety determined? Care is sometimes determined based on the number of staff available and longevity of management. In too many cases, they would not look any deeper than the fancy entrance and beautiful décor and make an emotional decision based on that alone.

There are better alternatives of how to begin and make a decision.

## Do an online search

This is the most dangerous way to begin. There is no way to determine safety or care. Online reviews are often not reliable. People are more than happy

to write a review when they are angry than when they are happy. Quite often, disgruntled staff who may have been fired for good reason will write a poor review. Reviews may also be outdated, and the situation may have been resolved since then. Reviews cannot be withdrawn once posted. Even if the concern is unfounded, there is no way to retract it, causing irreparable damage to an otherwise good community.

Pictures online or in brochures showing happy and engaged people are often stock art and rarely of the actual residents. The people depicted are usually 20 years younger than most people in assisted living! I’ve seen pictures of happy people coming off the tennis court or attending a rigorous exercise class. This is not realistic. But people often contact a community based entirely on the pictures because “it looks nice.”

If an online search has been done and a few local communities are chosen, it is now up to you to know what to look for and the questions to ask. A salesperson will happily schedule a tour with you and tell you why their community is the best choice. After visiting 3, 4, 5 or more communities, everything you learned will blur together and it will be difficult to distinguish one from the other.

## Work with a National referral company

There are large national companies who are very good at buying online keywords. If you do a search for “assisted living near me,” their company, not a community, will be the first option. Believing you are calling a community; they will ask for your contact information and a description of what you are looking for. You will be told that they will have a “few” communities contact you to schedule a tour. They will then send your contact information to every community in your area with little to no regard of your financial situation or care needs. Without warning, you will then receive unsolicited phone call after phone call. Talk about being overwhelmed! They will not accompany you on a tour nor help you with additional aspects of a move that you may need. They are also unfamiliar with safety or care concerns.

## Work with a local referral company

By working with a local referral company such as Senior Liaison of Central Florida, you will receive personalized service from the very first phone call. Your financial situation, care needs and location preference will be taken into consideration. Additional services that are needed, such as movers, Realtors, financial planners for Medicaid or Veteran’s benefits, can be arranged for you. They will narrow your search to just a few communities that fit your unique needs. They will accompany you on a tour and ask questions you may not have thought to ask. They will research the community’s state surveys to ensure that no complaints or fines have been filed against them. Annual surveys are always available upon request, however subsequent complaints are not. They will guide you through each step of the process and help to decipher the information you receive. Ultimately, the decision is up to you after making an educated decision, rather than an emotional decision.

In the event of a crisis, the stress of making a “good” decision is increased. By having the support of a professional to personally guide you each step of the way can go a long way toward reducing your stress.

For a helpful checklist of items to ask during a visit or more information, contact Janice Martin at Senior Liaison of Central Florida by calling **352-477-1866** or email us at [SeniorLiaisonCFL@gmail.com](mailto:SeniorLiaisonCFL@gmail.com). Please also visit our website at [SeniorLiaisonCFL.com](http://SeniorLiaisonCFL.com) or on Facebook at Senior Liaison.

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