



KEEPING YOUR INDEPENDENCE IN ASSISTED LIVING WITH TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

By Janice Martin, Owner of Senior Liaison of Central Florida

Transportation is an important amenity offered in assisted living. Everyone still needs access to get to appointments, shopping for personal items or banking. Maintaining a feeling of independence is vital whether or not someone is still driving.

Assisted living communities may have a wheelchair accessible bus and/or a car. Free transportation is available within a radius of 15-25 miles of a community. It can be for any reason in addition to medical appointments such as going out to lunch with a friend or going to the hairdresser. Often, transportation to church on Sundays may be available.

Scheduling the transportation at least 24 hours in advance is required. A request is generally coordinated with the concierge at the front desk. The destination, appointment time, and return time are entered, and every attempt is made to accommodate your request. Although there may be other residents who have reserved the same time, doctor visits take priority. The driver will create a route to drop off and pick up residents efficiently. The driver will assist the resident into the building but cannot stay with them.

When making a doctor's appointment, it's best to have the community arrange the appointment for you. If you do it yourself, there may be a conflict with the transportation schedule, and they will have to call the doctor to reschedule to another time or day that may not be convenient for you. This is where communication is so important. I know of one resident's daughter who went through the frustration of making an appointment for her father at the VA when his medication was due to run out in a few weeks. She left a transportation request; however, she did not communicate the necessity of the timing. The driver saw there was a scheduling conflict and called the VA and rescheduled the appointment without understanding that there was no longer enough time to get the prescription refilled.

Not all communities have transportation seven days a week and rarely in the evenings. If a resident wishes to go to the town square to enjoy the music or dinner and a movie, the bus may be able to take them, but it will be necessary to find alternative transportation back to the community. Many communities have specific days allocated for doctor's appointments and other days for shopping and outings. If an appointment is not scheduled in advance, some communities



might not allow for last minute requests. This can be discouraging when it appears that the bus is available. Remember that it may be leaving soon for pre-arranged transportation.

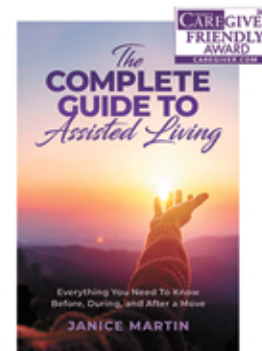
Residents may have their own car or golf cart at assisted living. There is generally no fee to park in the open spaces, but it may not be an assigned spot. Additional spaces may be used if available and many communities have golf cart charging stations. If a resident is living in independent living and has an assigned spot in covered parking, they must relinquish it if they move to assisted living in the same community.

The cost factor of having a car may not be realistic, even though it provides comfort knowing you may come and go at any time. I recently tried to help a woman move to assisted living, but she couldn't afford the community's apartment and care fees after paying a car payment, insurance, and gas and she refused to give up her car. She admitted that the only place she drove was to Russell Stover a few times a year to buy some chocolate, have some ice cream and watch the people. Although she recognized she needed care and a safer living environment, she was unable to be flexible. Activity staff will be more than happy to schedule an outing where other residents can also enjoy a special treat or event! If any resident has a request to go to a particular restaurant, see a movie, or even go to a casino, they simply need to ask to put it on the activity calendar for others to participate.

I have moved people into an assisted living who are no longer driving but refuse to give up their car. The resident kept possession of the keys and the car was parked at the community where it was visible at any time – but was made inoperable. They simply needed to be able to see the one thing that represented their independence.

Even if there is no car payment and little to no usage, the high cost of insurance can make it impractical to keep it. There are alternative transportation options to explore when the expense outweighs the necessity for care or safety. Uber is very popular and although they don't accept cash, anyone can create an account with a credit card. The concierge at the community can help with scheduling. There are also private transportation services if the destination is outside the community's parameters, or a private caregiver can help. No assisted living staff may drive a resident in a private vehicle that is not insured by the community.

Regardless of whether a person lives in their own home or assisted living, when someone must give up their ability to drive, there should always be an alternative plan. It can be difficult to accept a different way of thinking after doing something the same way for most of their lives. I encourage you to explore and discuss other alternatives and create a plan to successfully meet their transportation needs.



Janice Martin is an author, educator, advocate, and specialist on senior living options and the owner of Senior Liaison of Central Florida Inc. She has written **"The Complete Guide to Assisted Living: Everything You Need to Know Before, During, and After a Move."** This award winning and #1 best seller is available on Amazon.com in paperback and eBook. For more information, call 352-477-1866 or visit www.seniorliaisoncfl.com.



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