

The First 30 Days in Long-Term Care

A family caregiver's practical guide to settling in, communication and advocacy.

Your role is changing

When someone moves into long-term care, the daily responsibilities shift to the home, but family relationships and involvement remain important. There is no single correct way to adjust.

How to use this workbook

- ☐ Use the weekly checklists as prompts, not deadlines.
- ☐ Ask questions and request clarification whenever needed.
- ☐ Raise urgent health or safety concerns immediately — do not wait for a scheduled meeting.
- ☐ Respect the resident's wishes, privacy and decision-making rights.

What this guide does not do

This workbook does not collect names, medical histories, photographs, contact information or other identifying details. It complements, rather than replaces, the home's admission information and care planning process.

Getting Settled

Focus on comfort, routines, safety and knowing where to turn for help.

First-week checklist

- ☐ Ask who handles day-to-day questions and urgent concerns.
- ☐ Learn how meals, laundry, clothing labels and belongings are managed.
- ☐ Understand visiting, outings and accessibility arrangements.
- ☐ Ask how the home communicates changes in health, falls and other incidents.
- ☐ Find out how residents and families can participate in care planning.
- ☐ Ask about recreation and opportunities for meaningful daily engagement.
- ☐ Find out whether the home has an active Family Council.

Questions to ask

1. What does a typical day look like for residents?
2. How does the home help new residents adjust?
3. Who should be contacted if something does not seem right?

Understanding the Care Team

Different staff members support different parts of daily life. Learning their roles makes communication easier.

Who does what?

- ☐ Personal support workers or direct care staff: everyday personal care.
- ☐ Nurses: clinical concerns, assessments and nursing care.
- ☐ Recreation or life enrichment: activities, interests and connection.
- ☐ Dietary team: meals, food preferences and nutrition supports.
- ☐ Social work, care coordination or management: transitions, communication and system questions.

Job titles and responsibilities vary by home. Ask staff to explain the local process.

Questions to ask

1. What is the best way to share a non-urgent observation?
2. Who follows up if a question remains unanswered?
3. How are residents' preferences shared across shifts?
4. How can family members contribute without taking over the care team's responsibilities?

Care Planning & Advocacy

Families can support person-centred care by asking clear questions and understanding how follow-up works.

Care planning checklist

- ☐ Ask how and when care plans are reviewed.
- ☐ Understand how the resident and authorized family or substitute decision-maker can participate.
- ☐ Ask how changes in mobility, skin health, behaviour, nutrition or communication are assessed.
- ☐ Clarify how concerns are recorded, assigned and followed up.
- ☐ Ask how progress or changes will be communicated.

A simple way to raise a concern

1. Describe the specific observation without assumptions.
2. Ask what the care team understands about the issue.
3. Agree on the next step and when to expect an update.
4. Follow the home's escalation process if the issue remains unresolved.

In Ontario, residents have rights under the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021. Ask the home for its residents' rights and complaints information.

Finding a New Routine

The transition is not only about care tasks. Connection, familiar interests and the caregiver's well-being matter too.

Meaningful connection

- ☐ Explore visits that fit the resident's energy, preferences and abilities.
- ☐ Ask about music, sensory activities, social events and one-to-one engagement.
- ☐ Learn how residents can participate in decisions and daily routines.
- ☐ Consider ways to stay connected when conversation is difficult.

Your changing role

- ☐ Notice which responsibilities have shifted to the home.
- ☐ Decide which forms of involvement are sustainable for you.
- ☐ Ask for support when communication or adjustment is difficult.
- ☐ Allow yourself time to adjust without expecting a perfect routine.

Remember

Caregiving can continue through connection, advocacy and presence. It does not require managing every aspect of daily care.

Helpful Questions & Follow-Up

Use this page as a reference when speaking with the home. No identifying information needs to be recorded.

Questions worth keeping handy

1. Who is responsible for following up on this concern?
2. What is the expected next step?
3. When should I expect an update?
4. How can I reach the right person if circumstances change?
5. Where can I find the written complaints and escalation process?
6. How are resident preferences respected in this decision?

Communication habits that help

- ☐ Use specific observations rather than broad accusations.
- ☐ Ask for explanations in plain language.
- ☐ Confirm the next action and follow-up timeframe.
- ☐ Keep any sensitive notes separately and securely if you choose to make them.

Getting Connected

Family Councils can help relatives and friends learn, connect and contribute to home-wide quality of life.

Questions about Family Council

- ☐ Does the home have a Family Council?
- ☐ When and where are meetings held?
- ☐ How do families hear about events and initiatives?
- ☐ How can families suggest topics or offer feedback?
- ☐ Are there welcome resources for new families?

What Family Council can offer

Depending on the home, a Family Council may provide peer connection, education, information sharing and opportunities to bring collective concerns or ideas forward. It does not replace individual care planning or formal complaints processes.

A helpful distinction

For an immediate resident-specific concern, contact the appropriate care team or follow the home's complaints process. Family Council can complement these channels by focusing on shared experiences and home-wide improvements.

Beyond the First 30 Days

Adjustment is ongoing. There is no finish line at day 30.

Moving forward

- ☐ Continue learning about care planning and resident rights.
- ☐ Stay curious about recreation and meaningful connection.
- ☐ Review how the home communicates and responds to concerns.
- ☐ Connect with other families if that would be helpful.
- ☐ Revisit your own boundaries and support needs as circumstances change.

More caregiver resources

Explore practical long-term care tools and reflections at www.tbiwifelife.ca.

Because you matter, too.