

# Simple Assisted Living Evaluation Checklist

## Plus, Top Red Flags to Watch for on Tours

Use this checklist during each assisted living tour. Bring a notebook, take photos if allowed, and compare communities side by side afterward.

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### 1. First Impression

#### Look for:

- Clean, welcoming entrance
- Friendly greeting from staff
- Calm, comfortable atmosphere
- Residents who appear clean, dressed, and cared for
- No strong odors

#### Red flags:

- Strong urine, mildew, or cleaning-chemical smell
  - Staff seem rushed, irritated, or unavailable
  - Residents appear ignored, confused, or unkempt
  - The building feels chaotic, cold, or poorly maintained
  - You are kept only in polished “tour areas”
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### 2. Staff Interaction

#### Ask:

- How many caregivers are on duty during the day?
- How many are on duty overnight?
- What is the staff turnover rate?
- Are staff trained in dementia care?
- Who manages medications?

#### Red flags:

- Vague answers about staffing
- “We’re always fully staffed” without specifics
- Staff do not greet residents by name

- Caregivers seem overwhelmed or disengaged
  - High turnover or frequent use of temporary staff
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### **3. Resident Safety**

**Look for:**

- Clear hallways
- Grab bars and accessible bathrooms
- Good lighting
- Emergency call systems
- Secure areas if memory care is offered

**Red flags:**

- Cluttered walkways or fall hazards
  - Poor lighting
  - Broken equipment
  - Residents wandering without support
  - Call buttons not visible or not explained
  - Staff cannot explain fall procedures clearly
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### **4. Care Needs and Support**

**Ask:**

- What care services are included?
- What costs extra?
- How are care plans created and updated?
- What happens if my loved one needs more help later?
- Can residents age in place here?

**Red flags:**

- The community minimizes your loved one's needs
  - No clear care assessment process
  - No written care plan
  - Confusing answers about higher care levels
  - You are pressured to sign before care needs are fully reviewed
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## 5. Medication Management

### Ask:

- Who gives medications?
- How are medication errors prevented?
- How are medication changes handled?
- Is a nurse involved?
- How are families notified of concerns?

### Red flags:

- Medication process is unclear
  - Staff seem unsure who manages medications
  - No nurse oversight
  - No system for documenting medication changes
  - Families are not routinely updated
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## 6. Food and Dining

### Look for:

- Clean dining room
- Residents eating comfortably
- Staff assisting residents who need help
- Menus with variety
- Options for special diets

### Red flags:

- Residents sitting with untouched food
  - Staff rushing meals
  - Limited menu choices
  - Poor cleanliness in dining areas
  - No clear plan for residents who forget to eat or need assistance
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## 7. Activities and Social Life

### Ask:

- What activities happen daily?

- Are activities adapted for different ability levels?
- How do staff encourage residents to participate?
- Are residents engaged during your visit?

**Red flags:**

- Activity calendar looks full, but nothing is happening
  - Residents are mostly parked in front of a TV
  - Few options beyond bingo or passive entertainment
  - No meaningful activities for memory care residents
  - Staff cannot describe how they help isolated residents engage
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## 8. Cleanliness and Maintenance

**Look for:**

- Clean floors and bathrooms
- Well-kept resident rooms
- Safe outdoor areas
- Working lights, handrails, and elevators
- Fresh laundry and bedding

**Red flags:**

- Dirty bathrooms
  - Overflowing trash
  - Stained furniture or carpets
  - Broken fixtures
  - Poorly maintained outdoor spaces
  - Laundry odors or missing clothing complaints
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## 9. Communication With Families

**Ask:**

- How often are families updated?
- Who should families contact with concerns?
- How are falls, medication changes, or health changes communicated?
- Are care conferences offered?

**Red flags:**

- No clear point of contact
  - Families only hear from staff when there is a crisis
  - Defensive responses to questions
  - No formal process for complaints
  - The community discourages family involvement
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## 10. Pricing and Contracts

### Ask:

- What is the base monthly cost?
- What is included?
- What services cost extra?
- How often can rates increase?
- What happens if care needs change?
- Is there a move-in fee?
- What is the discharge policy?

### Red flags:

- Pricing is not clearly explained
  - Fees are discussed only verbally
  - Add-on care costs are vague
  - Pressure to sign quickly
  - Contract terms are difficult to understand
  - No clear explanation of when a resident may be asked to move out
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## Top Tour Red Flags to Take Seriously

Be cautious if you notice:

1. **Strong odors throughout the building**  
Occasional odors can happen, but persistent smells may suggest poor care, cleaning, or toileting support.
2. **Residents appear unattended or distressed**  
Look for residents calling for help, sitting alone for long periods, or appearing visibly uncomfortable.
3. **Staff avoid questions or give vague answers**  
Good communities should be willing to explain staffing, care plans, pricing, and safety procedures.

4. **The tour feels overly controlled**  
If you are only shown perfect areas and discouraged from seeing common spaces, dining, or activity areas, ask why.
5. **High-pressure sales tactics**  
Phrases like “You need to decide today” or “This rate is only available now” should make families pause.
6. **No clear plan for changing care needs**  
Assisted living should be able to explain what happens if a resident needs more help later.
7. **Residents seem disengaged**  
A quiet community is not always bad, but residents should not appear routinely isolated, bored, or ignored.
8. **Staff seem unhappy or overwhelmed**  
The mood of the care team often affects the resident experience.
9. **Pricing is confusing or incomplete**  
Families should understand the likely monthly cost before making a decision.
10. **Your instincts feel uneasy**  
If something feels off, ask more questions, visit again at a different time, or bring another family member with you.

## Simple Scoring Sheet

Rate each category from 1 to 5.

Category	Score
Cleanliness	___ / 5
Staff friendliness	___ / 5
Resident appearance and engagement	___ / 5
Safety features	___ / 5
Care services	___ / 5
Medication management	___ / 5
Food and dining	___ / 5
Activities and social life	___ / 5
Communication with families	___ / 5
Pricing transparency	___ / 5

**Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_ / 50**

A high score does not guarantee the community is the right fit, but a low score or multiple red flags means you should slow down, ask more questions, and keep looking.