



*For some people, the symptoms of relocation stress may be obvious changes in health, personality or disposition. For others, the changes may be more subtle. It is critical that the receiving facility understand what a resident is usually like, so any changes are potentially recognized as symptoms of relocation stress syndrome.*



Relocation Stress Syndrome, also called Transfer Trauma, is a formal nursing diagnosis and defined as “physiologic and/or psychosocial disturbances as a result of transfer from one environment to another.” It is otherwise defined as “the combination of medical and psychological reactions to abrupt physical transfer that may increase the risk of grave illness or death.”

While relocation stress syndrome is sometimes minimized or even discounted, elders, especially those with cognitive impairments, may experience greater than average difficulties in adjusting to changes in routine. Having to move from one’s home to a nursing home or assisted living facility (or even from one room to another) can result in confusion, depression and agitation. This may lead to increased falls, self-care deficits and weight loss.



**Wisconsin Board on Aging and Long Term Care**  
1402 Pankratz St., Suite 111  
Madison, WI 53704-4001  
**1-800-815-0015**  
[longtermcare.wi.gov](http://longtermcare.wi.gov)  
[boaltc@wisconsin.gov](mailto:boaltc@wisconsin.gov)



## **Awareness: Relocation Stress Syndrome**

**Long Term Care  
Ombudsman Program  
1-800-815-0015**

## Measures to Minimize Relocation Stress

The involvement of familiar people, the maintaining of consistent daily patterns and routines, and assisting the resident in becoming acquainted with new surroundings can help minimize stress associated with relocation. Slow and thorough discharge planning that provides the resident with an opportunity to tour alternate living arrangements and, most importantly, that **asks the residents what it is that they want** can help ease the adjustment of needing to move.

- Promptly **inform the resident** of the need to move and present an optimistic attitude by pointing out any positive aspects of the relocation
- Thoroughly **assess the resident's needs and preferences** and discuss all available options for relocating
- **Offer written information about options and provide tours.** Provide an escort and follow up to see whether or not the resident liked the proposed new setting
- Allow the resident time to think on the matter and **provide opportunities to ask questions or state concerns**
- **Listen** to what the resident is saying and respond honestly. Resolve concerns promptly

- Honor preferences, allowing the resident to maintain control. **Be flexible** as plans can change
- Keep the resident informed throughout the planning process. Encourage the **participation of friends and families**
- **Thoroughly plan and pay attention to detail.** Ensure consistent approaches for care; especially for assistance with eating, ambulation and medication administration
- **Be prepared, be organized.** Avoid chaos, provide a sense of security to the resident
- Maintain the resident's **daily routine** throughout the planning process and the move to the new home. Make arrangements for telephone and other services including the notification of a change of address. Notify interested persons of the move
- **Safeguard personal possessions,** and help pack and move belongings. Involve the resident and family to set up the new room similar to the old room
- **Help the resident become acclimated to their new surroundings** by offering tours and assistance with unpacking. Consider having a welcoming committee, matching a staff member/volunteer with each individual
- **Have adequate staff on duty** to meet all of the residents' needs and to help settle in
- **Educate everyone** about Relocation Stress - all staff members, residents, families, volunteers, friends

- **Monitor for signs of Relocation Stress,** never minimize or ignore these characteristics
- Create opportunities for residents to **discuss concerns** and fears - e.g. support groups, counseling
- Offer support, be empathetic, **visit often,** and respect the individual's rights

## Characteristics of Relocation Stress

- Depression
- Loneliness
- Sadness
- Negative comments about staff
- Crying
- Expressing concern
- Despair
- Being upset
- Confusion
- Resistance
- Indecision
- Unwillingness to move
- Apprehension
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Aggressiveness
- Restlessness
- Change in eating habits
- Sleep disturbance
- Weight change
- Dependency
- Stomach problems
- Insecurity
- Hallucinations
- Distrust
- Falls
- Withdrawal/isolation