

# Are Your KIDS Ready for

Two families talk about what happens when seniors are ready to make the move.

By Erin Brereton



Windsor resident Rosa Hopkins enjoys a visit from her daughter, Jen Michel, and her granddaughters, Avery and Zoe.

Contrary to stereotypes about kids pushing parents into senior living, sometimes adult children are the ones who need to be convinced that it's time for their parents to make the move. Some feel sentimental about parents selling their childhood homes; others are concerned that their parents are making a hasty decision and some worry that senior living means their parents are slowing down. But many seniors recognize that moving into a community is a fresh start for the whole family.

## Rosa Hopkins, 73

Shortly after Rosa Hopkins' husband died in late 2011, wind-related roof and water damage forced her to stay in a hotel for a year while her Glendale, California, home was repaired.

After the repair work was complete, Hopkins moved back into her home for about two years. Then she began thinking about other options.

"I thought, why am I here sitting and waiting for something else to go wrong when my house is nice and fixed up, and I'm not even using half the rooms?" she says. "I thought, if I were smart, I'd put it on the market when it's in good order."

Luckily, Hopkins had a next step in mind. Her family was familiar with Windsor, a be.group senior living community in Glendale—her mother-in-law had lived there for several years.

When she decided to move to the community last February, however, her daughters were a little



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uneasy. Hopkins says they were concerned about her selling the home they grew up in and worried she hadn't thought the decision through. Her children even wondered if she was too young to move to a senior community.

"I know both of them shed some tears over the house, because I saw it," she says. "It came as a blow to them, and they just didn't want me to be making a spur-of-the-moment decision. We talked about it quite a bit."

The conversations helped. Packing did, too. As Hopkins' 40-year-old daughter, who lives in Thousand Oaks, California, and her 38-year-old daughter, in town from Spokane, Washington, helped sort through her belongings, each claimed photo books and other treasured mementos which helped them get used to the idea.

In the two months that Hopkins has lived in Windsor, one daughter has already visited with her children and husband. Hopkins' granddaughters, 4 and 6, were excited to stop by Windsor's refreshment station.

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## Parental Persuasion

Children—even as adults—may express a number of reservations about a parent moving into a senior community. One big source of concern stems from common misconceptions many people have regarding what senior living communities actually offer. They don't realize that today's communities give active adults the chance to live independently, meet new people and experience life in whole new ways.

Moving, like any big change, affects the entire family, says Deborah Heiser, an applied development psychologist who specializes in aging. She says it's important to be upfront and get your children involved early. "People generally want what's best for their parents," Heiser says. "But they may not see it in the full context."

If you're trying to convince your adult children that living in a senior community is truly the best move, the following suggestions may help bring them on board:

### TALK EARLY—AND OFTEN.

Find out what is holding the kids back from embracing the decision. For many, it's the loss of a childhood home. "The emotional aspects of getting rid of the home a child grew up in are pretty big," Heiser says. "It can be very hard on adult children. As soon as a person thinks, 'Hey, I'd like to consider moving,' that's the time to bring the kids in."

### MAKE YOUR MOTIVATION

**CLEAR.** Articulate the benefits you'll realize from the move, which will help prevent your kids from thinking you're being impulsive. Everything from increased opportunity for social

interaction to safety can greatly improve quality of life. "Once parents explain it, kids can understand, but parents need to make that really explicit and obvious," says Brian Carpenter, an associate professor of psychology at Washington University.

### EXPLAIN THE BURDENS OF HOMEOWNERSHIP.

Homeownership involves at least occasional—and sometimes laborious and expensive—repairs, which some seniors may not be eager to take on. There's also the usual work caring for the lawn and handling routine repairs, which can become more cumbersome as a person ages.

**TOUR TOGETHER.** Visit several communities to make an informed choice. "Make the decision together, which will reduce conflict because you've engaged your children to be in the process with you," says Janna Heyman, an associate dean at the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service.

**TURN KIDS INTO PACKING PALS.** "Doing it together is usually best," Heiser says. "Having your child get little aspects of the home to take with them—such as a meaningful photo—can be really powerful and can help the person say, 'I'm OK with this.'"





Photo: Rick Mendosa

Rosa Hopkins and her family spend time playing a game at Windsor.

## Minnie Dilbeck, 87

Herminia “Minnie” Dilbeck began to think about moving from her La Cañada Flintridge, California, home shortly after she had a stroke. Her six children were also concerned about Dilbeck living alone—but they had a different solution in mind.

“Everyone wanted me to go live with them!” she says. “One of my sons said he’d build a little apartment in the backyard, and another said he’d buy a trailer and put it in the back of his house. But I didn’t want them to do that.”

Dilbeck had considered relocating to an apartment complex in downtown Glendale, California, where she could walk to restaurants. But difficult-to-access features like a deep bathtub and an out-of-reach microwave changed her mind about apartment living.

Several months earlier, she had visited a former neighbor who’d moved to Windsor. The time Dilbeck spent at Windsor piqued her curiosity about community living.

Dilbeck checked out several other senior living communities and met with her children—who were somewhat surprised by her decision.

“They knew I wanted to move,” Dilbeck says. “But they were falling out of their chairs when I told them where.”

To convince them, Dilbeck involved her children in the decision-making process. At different times each of her five children went with her to check out Windsor—whose flowers and friendliness won them over—and another helped her pick out her residence.

“I showed them everything,” she says. “They came here and were all very happy about it.”

Dilbeck has been, too. Roughly three years after moving, she still loves community life. “Everybody is very kind,” she says. “We know everyone and share everything. The minute you get here, you all become friends.”

As an added bonus, Dilbeck’s family owns a real estate business, and the main office is nearby. Two sons also live closeby, and she has lunch with them every Monday.

Her daughters-in-law have come to Windsor for brunch, and she’s had two grandchildren stay overnight. Last year, relatives stopped by for the community’s Christmas party. “They know getting together is important to me,” she says.

When she’s not hosting family, Dilbeck likes to join other residents in a spirited game of Rummikub. She’s also gone on group outings to the theater, concerts and dinners—a marked change from her last few years as a homeowner.

“I wasn’t going anywhere because I didn’t want to go out at night by myself,” she says. “I’d have to go to a matinee, take myself to dinner and go home. We go out in groups here, which makes it nice.”

Visit [thebgroup.org/thetalk](https://thebgroup.org/thetalk) for more information on talking to your family about moving.