

The First 30 Days

A Practical Toolkit for
Successfully Onboarding
New Caregivers



Introduction

The first 30 days are crucial in shaping a caregiver's confidence, performance, and long-term success.

Yet when communities are busy, onboarding can quickly default to an administrative exercise focused on paperwork and one-size-fits-all training, leaving little time for coaching, mentorship, and relationship-building.

This toolkit is designed to help senior living operators create a more consistent and practical onboarding experience that builds confidence, supports caregivers, and sets both new hires and residents up for success.

01 Prepare Before They Arrive

A caregiver's first day should be focused on becoming familiar with the community, not waiting for logins, uniforms, or direction.

How to best prepare before a caregiver's first day:

- ☐ **Have everything ready before they walk through the door**, including badges, uniforms, system access, schedules, and any required equipment.
- ☐ **Assign a mentor or "go-to" team member who can answer questions**, demonstrate your community's best practices, and provide direct support throughout the first month.
- ☐ **Let the rest of the team know who's joining ahead of time** and encourage them to introduce themselves to help the new caregiver feel welcome.
- ☐ **Create a simple schedule for the first week so caregivers know what they'll be learning each day**, so they don't feel overwhelmed or unsure of what's expected.
- ☐ **Complete as much paperwork and compliance training as possible before clinical training** begins so caregivers can focus on learning the role.

02 Help New Caregivers Feel Like Part of the Team

Team members are more likely to stay when they feel connected to the people around them. Employees who have a “best friend” at work are 7x more likely to be engaged.

How to create a welcoming first week:

- ☐ **Introduce new caregivers to residents, families (when appropriate), and colleagues** across departments, not just their immediate team.
- ☐ **Explain how different departments work together** so caregivers understand how nursing, dining, housekeeping, maintenance, and activities support one another.
- ☐ **Share stories about caregivers who went above and beyond for a resident**, giving specific examples of what great care looks like in your community.
- ☐ **Invite new caregivers to ask questions every day**, rather than expecting them to speak up only if something goes wrong.
- ☐ **Check in at the end of each shift during the first week with a simple question:** “What felt good today, and what felt challenging?”

03 Build Confidence Before Expecting Independence

Most caregivers don't need less support after orientation. They need targeted support while putting new skills into practice.

How to best build confidence through coaching:

- ☐ **Gradually increase responsibilities** instead of expecting caregivers to manage a full assignment immediately.
- ☐ **Observe caregivers during routine tasks and offer specific, timely feedback** while the experience is still fresh.
- ☐ **Celebrate wins early and often**, whether it's building trust with residents, completing documentation accurately, or communicating well with teammates.
- ☐ **Create a “no dumb questions” environment. Let caregivers know that asking for help is part of the job**, not a sign of weakness.
- ☐ **Schedule brief one-on-one check-ins during the first month** to discuss wins, concerns, and any additional support they may need.

04 Thoughtful Mentor Pairings Make a Huge Difference

The right mentor can help new caregivers settle in faster, build confidence, and feel like part of the team.

How to best set mentors up for success:

- ☐ **Spend some time thinking about the most ideal mentor pairings.** Choose someone who's a good match for your new hire's personality, communication style, and work habits.
- ☐ **Explain what's expected of mentors** so they know they're there to answer questions, offer guidance, and check in regularly throughout the first month.
- ☐ **Lighten their assignment when possible,** instead of expecting them to train someone while juggling a full workload.
- ☐ **Encourage mentors to share the little things** that aren't covered in orientation, like daily routines, helpful shortcuts, and tips to build trust with residents and families.
- ☐ **Thank them for the extra time they're investing** and recognize the important role they play in helping new caregivers succeed.

05 Look for Small Signs That Extra Support Is Needed

The goal isn't to catch people making mistakes. It's to identify coaching opportunities before small challenges become bigger problems.

How to best identify opportunities for additional support:

- ☐ **Pay attention to patterns, not isolated moments.** Repeated questions, incomplete documentation, or hesitation during routine tasks may signal the need for additional coaching.
- ☐ **Ask specific questions instead of "How's it going?"** For example: "Is there anything you're still unsure about?" or "What part of the job feels hardest right now?"
- ☐ **Invite mentors and supervisors to share observations regularly** so concerns can be addressed early and consistently.
- ☐ **Provide additional coaching as soon as gaps are identified** rather than waiting for a formal performance review.
- ☐ **Remember that needing extra support is normal.** The goal is steady progress, not perfection.

06 Learn From Every New Hire

Every onboarding experience is an opportunity to improve the next one.

How to best strengthen your onboarding process over time:

- ☐ **Ask new caregivers what was most helpful during their first month**, and what they wish had been explained sooner.
- ☐ **Look for recurring themes in feedback from new hires, mentors, and supervisors** to identify opportunities for improvement.
- ☐ **Review early turnover** to understand whether onboarding, scheduling, communication, or workload may have contributed.
- ☐ **Update your onboarding process regularly** as resident needs, staffing models, and community priorities evolve.
- ☐ **Follow up after 30, 60, and 90 days** to make sure caregivers continue to feel supported and have the resources they need to succeed.

Looking Back

Great onboarding doesn't require a complicated program. It just needs leaders who make time to teach, answer questions, and help new caregivers build confidence from day one.

Those early investments empower them, support your team, and ultimately lead to better care for residents.

