



Background

For more than 30 years, The Eden Alternative has been a driving force in transforming the culture of care for Elders. Rooted in the [Eden Alternative Ten Principles®](#) and [Domains of Well-Being®](#), our approach is designed to eliminate the institutional model of care and replace it with true home – wherever an Elder may live.

Through [education, consultation and membership](#), The Eden Alternative equips individuals and organizations with resources, tools and ongoing support to create person-directed care. In the Eden Approach®, the Elder – the person accepting support – is the primary decision-maker in shaping how life unfolds and how support is delivered.

Eden Tracks & Practices®

Since its founding, The Eden Alternative has worked with individuals and organizations committed to transforming systems of care. Based on these shared experiences, best Practices have emerged that help people shift from institutional approaches to person-directed living. These Practices are organized into Eden Tracks (themes), which address core areas of transformation.

[Eden Members](#) gain access to the Tracks & Practices as part of membership.

Through their commitment, they take these practices and make change happen – adapting them to their own unique settings, whether that's a private home, assisted living, nursing home, or community-based service. Consultation and training provide additional support and guidance to bring these practices to life.

Some members are just beginning their Eden journey, while others have been creating culture change for years. Each is unique in creating a caring, inclusive, and vibrant community for those accepting their support. Member organizations that have made significant progress in implementing the Eden Approach can be found

on the [map](#) on the Eden Alternative website.

How to Use This Guide

This Consumer Guide is designed to be a tool to assist you in exploring how well an organization or service provider is creating person-directed care – and whether their approach will be a good fit for you or a loved one.

Doing well with the Eden Approach means that:

- Relationships are being nurtured among everyone involved.
- Education about the Eden Approach is offered to employees, Elders, and families.
- Leaders can clearly speak to the Eden Principles, their vision, and how those who live and work there are thriving.
- Trust, optimism, and generosity can be felt in daily interactions.

When you enter the home or community — whether that's a private residence, an assisted living environment, or a long-term care community — you might find yourself thinking: *"I'm not sure what it is, but it feels different. This place has a good feel to it."*

The questions in this guide are organized into three sections:

- **Employee Care Partners** – those employed to support Elders
- **Elders** – those living in a home or community, or receiving services at home
- **Formal leaders** – those in leadership roles within the organization or service

The Eden Alternative believes that a quality of life for Elders is more important than the treatment they receive for physical and mental health. Growth, purpose, and meaning throughout all of life are central to creating a life worth living. As Eden Members implement Eden Tracks & Practices, decisions will move closer to the Elders, and everyone connected with the organization or service experiences greater well-being.

Definitions

The Eden Alternative believes that words make worlds. Therefore, we promote language that helps us all to see the world differently and bring about change. The following are some definitions that will help you understand this new language and why it is being used in this guide.

- **Care Partner**: A balanced care relationship, where everyone – including the

Elder – both gives and receives care.

- **Elder**: Someone who by virtue of life experience is here to teach us how to live. By this definition, even someone who is not chronologically older can be an Elder.
- **Eden Associate**: Someone who has completed Eden Alternative's intensive training, equipping them with knowledge and tools to bring about change.
- **Empowerment**: The creation of an environment that honors and brings forth the decision-making skills of everyone, most especially the Elders and those closest to them. Empowerment activates choice, autonomy and influence.
- **Simple Pleasures**: Personal moments of joy or fulfillment unique to each individual.
- **Warm climate**: A culture where hearts and minds are open, trust and optimism thrive, and people are receptive to meaningful change.

Be a Guest in the Elders' Home

The best way to determine if the support services being offered will meet your needs or the needs of those you care about is to spend time there – whether that means visiting a residence, touring a community, or observing in-home services.

This guide provides questions that will help you discover whether the approach is truly relationship-driven and supportive of a life worth living. Feel free to reword these questions in a way that feels natural for you. Each question includes what to listen for in the response.

Employee Care Partner Questions

- ☐ Can you tell me about the mission of your organization?
(You want to explore if those that work here understand their organization's mission. Understanding the organization's mission helps create a common purpose in achieving goals as a team)
- ☐ Do you feel you know the individuals you spend time with daily well?
(You should be looking for stories that speak to the relationships, the excitement of the person you are speaking to, their connection with people they support, and their love for the job. See if they share stories that go beyond large group activities and/or tasks they assist with.)
- ☐ What does The Eden Alternative mean to you?
(Listen to see if they can express what The Eden Alternative is about and how it affects them and those they support. This will help you know what education opportunities they have had access to.)
- ☐ What kinds of fun things do you do with the individuals you support daily?
(You are looking for stories about fun and enjoyment, support from leadership, are their talents brought into their work, flexible daily routines, and if they are focused on the person they are supporting or the tasks they have been assigned to do.)
- ☐ My __ loves to __ Would he/she be able to continue doing this with your support?
(You are looking to see if decisions are made by the individuals accepting support, if daily schedules are directed by the individual's normal routines, if they are honoring and knowing their simple pleasures, and if they are focused on strengths more than deficits.)
- ☐ What is the best thing you like about your work?
(Look for answers that show the empowerment of employees, love/dedication to the Elders, and healthy relationships on the care partner team.)
- ☐ If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?
(Learn about the empowerment of the employee, if they feel safe to share without reprisal, what you hear in the response, and are they venting or speaking to opportunities for the care partner team to improve the support they provide.)
- ☐ If my __ moved in/accepted your support, what would you need from me to make their life meaningful?
(Learn about the commitment or involvement from family/guardian/friends, how you can be involved in the daily life of the individual, do they see family as an adversary or asset, and if this a welcoming care partner team. Look to see if they are comfortable in engaging in a conversation about what they need from you to be successful in their professional role.)

- Can you tell me what a typical day will be like for someone that is aging and living with changing abilities in this home/community?
(Look to see if they share stories of how the individuals they support are well-known, how they continue to have opportunities to enjoy their simple pleasures, and if the employee care partners are working on recognizing and eliminating loneliness, helplessness or boredom.)

Elder Care Partner Questions

(for those living in a community OR receiving care at home)

- What is the best thing that happened to you today?
(Looking to hear stories about variety, spontaneity, and choices, and to see a light in their eyes.)
- Do you have a friend here (in the home or within the community)?
(Listen to how they describe this relationship. Does it appear to be a strong, caring relationship where there is opportunity for the relationship to flourish?)
- What does person-directed care and The Eden Alternative mean to you?
(Have they heard of person-directed care and The Eden Alternative? Can they express what it is about and how it affects them?)
- What did you ask for at ___(meal) today? Did you get what you asked for?
(To see if it is safe to ask for choices and if choices are met.)
- If you need something, who do you go to?
(See if they appear comfortable asking for assistance from employee care partners. Find out who the individual knows and what they know about them.)
- What are your plans for this morning/afternoon/evening?
(Hear about flexibility, choices, are they experiencing loneliness, helplessness, or boredom, and is life the same every day.)

Leadership Care Partner Questions

- What does The Eden Alternative mean to you?
(Can they express what The Eden Alternative is about and how it affects them and the individuals they support?)
- When visiting or being a guest in a home/community (e.g., nursing home or assisted living), note who gives you a tour, how much time they spend and if you needed an appointment. What did they do to make you feel welcome?

(This reveals information about their focus on relationships, who speaks for the organization, and how they welcome those who are new to them.)

- When visiting a community-based service organization, note who you are speaking to, how much time they spend and if you needed an appointment. What did they do to make you feel welcome?

(This reveals information about their focus on relationships, who speaks for the organization, and how they welcome those who are new to them.)

- When touring or being a guest in a home/community (e.g., nursing home or assisted living), note who the tour guide acknowledges by name, what they know about them and if they touch in some manner like a handshake or on the shoulder.

(Look to see if the leadership of the organization knows the people that live and work there and what the relationships are like. Does there appear to be trust and a level of comfort between individuals?)

- When visiting a community-based service organization, notice how they refer to those who will be caring for your loved one in their home.

(Does the leadership of the organization know the people that work for them and what are the relationships like?)

- Was there an opportunity to meet with the Administrator or Executive Director during the tour?

(Pay attention to the top formal leader's accessibility to others.)

- How long have those in top leadership roles been in their position? (For example, the Administrator, Executive Director, Director of Nursing) If they are new, ask, "How long was the previous leader in their position?"

(Learn about leadership turnover and corporate/ownership practices.)

- How many of the employees are Eden Associates? Which formal leaders or managers are Eden Associates?

(Learn about whether the formal leadership has fully embraced The Eden Alternative, grown leaders in this approach through advanced education and are educating others inside and outside the organization as well.)

- What have you done so far to educate employees, families, and Elders about The Eden Alternative?

(Are the leaders spreading the word and sharing the vision across their organization?)

- Is there any written information that you could give me today about The Eden Alternative?

(Do they have materials available for visitors, families, etc.?)

- What dreams and improvements would you like to bring to this organization or support services?
(Listen for the larger goals the leaders are striving to achieve and whether they are continuing to stretch and grow together. Can they express their vision of the future to you?)
- What are you working on right now related to The Eden Alternative? Who is involved in this effort?
(How are they transforming mindsets, systems and processes to move away from the traditional medical model of care for individuals accepting support? Are they engaging others, including the individual accepting support, in the changes they are making?)
- What are you doing to warm the climate here?
(Are they making an effort to deepen relationships and connections among all employees, individuals accepting support and their families? Do they invest themselves in ensuring that trust, optimism and generosity thrive? Are the leaders doing good deeds for others daily?)