



## **How to Talk to your Parents About Eldercare Needs**

This is the conversation that every adult child dreads – the first conversation with their parents about making some lifestyle changes which they know their parents will resist. The role reversal that takes place between an adult child and the parent is interesting. The adult child wants what is best for the parent and has suggestions on how the parent can be helped, while the parent is often insistent that they are fine and sometimes in denial about the stage of his or her health.

Sometimes these conversations can take years before any decisions are finally made. Part of the reason for this is due to the gap between the perspective of the child versus the parent. The child approaches the conversation from a state of concern: they are concerned about the safety of the parent living alone, sometimes in house that is too big to manage; they are concerned about whether the parent is eating properly; they are concerned about whether the parent is remembering to take his or her medications; and finally they are concerned whether the parent is getting adequate personal care. The senior parent on the other hand, believes they are doing fine, doing the things they have always done, in the manner they have always done them. They are often fiercely independent, and resistant to change. They may feel their children are overreacting to one or two incidents which should not be turned into a larger issue. They fear losing independence, and they are of a generation that is very frugal with spending.

If the above description sounds like your family, the following tips may be helpful.

### ***Start Early***

Make sure you start talking early about the topic of aging, before any obvious health problems impact your parents' life. You don't have to talk about all the big issues all at once; incrementally talking about aging gives time for your loved one to adjust to the idea and think about what they want and how best to approach it. The more time you give yourself to talk about it, the better your strategy will be, and the better equipped your parent will be for coping with the change.

It's natural to not want to deal with the matter. Aging can be a sensitive subject, but the reality is the sooner you tackle it, the better off you will be in the long run.

### *Find an Appropriate Time*

If you are going to discuss eldercare matters in depth, be mindful of when and where you are having the discussion. Holidays, special occasions, or periods of high stress might best be avoided if possible. Be sure to bring up the subject at a calm time to avoid bleed-over from past emotional conversations.

### *Approach with Empathy*

It can be difficult for anyone to deal with the process of aging. Make sure you approach the topic with understanding and empathy. Try to avoid the approach that there is a problem that needs to be addressed promptly. Rather, emphasize the fact that aging is a natural progression in the life of anyone. Remember that though your instinct might be to address the issue efficiently and directly, your parent might need time to let the idea sink in. Be cautious with your wording and make sure to give your parent ample time to contribute to the conversation. Let them feel they are in charge of their own decisions.

### *Watch Your Wording*

The nature of parent-child relationships mean that sometimes arguments occur. Saying things like “you’re so stubborn”, or “why can’t you see that you can’t take care of yourself anymore” are unlikely to yield a good end result. Take caution with your wording and tone while addressing the matters. Your parent will be more likely to match your calm manner tone and listen to what you have to say. Try phrasing the conversation in such a way which makes assisted living more convenient, rather than a necessity. Try phrases like “wouldn’t it be nice if you didn’t have to do the dishes?” or “you’ll have a nice garden without any of the effort!”

### *Educate them*

Try to find some written material, videos, and other things which you can give them where they can learn for themselves some of the options they have available to them. There is an abundance of information online, and some hospitals have information booklets and resource libraries to help families learn about various health conditions. If they can learn something from a neutral educational or reference source, that will give them a different perspective.

### *Encourage them to Talk to Others*

Do you already have extended family or other loved ones who are happy in seniors’ residences? Try talking to them to ease your parent’s concerns. Or, perhaps your parents know other older adults who are facing some similar changes in the next while. If they are comfortable, they can try speaking to friends who might have some information or insight. This can make them feel better about the transition—the fact that it happens to everyone.

### *Involve Professionals*

Sometimes senior parents will put more weight on the opinion of a professional third party than their own children – go figure! If you feel this is the case with your parent, enlist the help of a third party case manager, a geriatrician, the family doctor, a medical specialist, or if your parent is in hospital, the care team lead.

### *Take Baby Steps*

Lastly, take small steps to start. Don't expect that your parents will make huge changes overnight. Lots of lifestyle changes can be tried on a trial basis, such as a couple of nights in a furnished guest suite at an assisted living residence, or trying to get a few hours a week of home help. Even mobility walkers can be returned to the store! As you can see, a lot of changes don't need to be long term commitments, and if your parent has the comfort of knowing they can change their minds, or go back to the status quo, it may make them feel better about trying something new.

If you would like to obtain some further advice on this topic, or involve Home to Home in providing your parents with some third party guidance and information, please contact us for a complimentary consultation.

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