

# How to Talk with Parents About Aging: 5 Tips and Conversation Starters

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## Talking to aging parents about changes is tough

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You might have noticed that your parents are starting to need more help.

Maybe the house is unusually dirty, they're not eating properly, or medication doses are being missed.

Talking with parents about aging and lifestyle changes can be tricky, but for everyone's sake, it's better to have these conversations **before** a crisis hits.

It's good to keep in mind that what you're discussing will likely mean big life changes, so it will take more than one conversation before things start to happen. Your parents will need time to get used to the idea and accept that they need more help.

And because these are sensitive topics, planning ahead will make the conversations easier and more productive for everyone.

We've got 5 useful tips to help you plan what you're going to say, how to introduce the topic, and how to make the conversations as successful as possible.

## 5 tips for how to talk with parents about aging

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### 1. General guidelines

- Write an outline to organize your thoughts. This also gives you something to follow so you won't forget important points.
- Approach the conversation around the most important considerations for older adults: safety, freedom, peace of mind, social connection, and being able to make choices.
- Emphasize that there aren't "right" or "wrong" options or ideas. It's helpful to keep an open mind and consider a range of options.

## **2. Be respectful and considerate**

- Put yourself in their shoes. Let them know you care about how they feel and what they want.
- Be a good listener. Let them talk and really listen, even if you don't agree or what they say makes you think about your own aging.
- Your relationship may change as you have these conversations and take a more active role in their life, but you shouldn't consider yourself the "parent" or that you now "know what's best."

## **3. Who will be there and where will this happen?**

- Involve everyone in the family who should be there.
- Plan for plenty of time to talk in a quiet place where your parents will feel calm and can focus on the conversation.

## **4. Do a practice run**

If you're nervous about the conversation, run your ideas past someone who's impartial – a social worker at a local agency or senior center, a counselor or therapist, or a leader at your church.

## **5. Use conversation starters to ease into the subject**

- Start with some casual conversations to plant seeds. Then build on those to lead to bigger, more decision-focused conversations later.
- Consider using these ice breakers:
  - Say something like "I've noticed some things take more energy these days. What are the important things you really want to do?" Or "What are your priorities? Is there a way we can make it easier for you to do those things?"
  - Mention how much you admire the way they've handled retirement and ask for advice on what has worked well for them so that you can learn from them.
  - Use an event in the news or a story about an aging family member or friend. Say, "We never talk about these things. I don't want to pry, but it would give me peace of mind to know there's a plan if we need it."



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