



Tackling the Topic: Tips for Adults Talking to Their Parents About Senior Living Choices

You can dance around the issue and pretend there's no problem. That's what 75% of families do. But when it's too hard to ignore, take a deep breath, set aside the time, and use these tips to begin a rich conversation about senior living choices.

Start with these tips when you need to talk to an aging parent about senior living, senior care, and the way forward for your family.



Before the Conversation ... Where to Begin



Do your homework. Before you initiate the conversation about senior care, prepare yourself:

Create a list of your concerns for your aging parent.

Are you worried, for example, that their home is no longer a safe environment for them? Or that the mistakes they keep making with their medication will have a dangerous outcome next time around? Write down all your concerns.

Educate yourself.

As you learn more about senior care options, you'll get ideas about what might be the best fit for your parent. Admitting just how much help your loved one needs isn't easy, and you may find yourself downplaying just how serious their need for help really is. But be as objective as you can.

Learn how important environment is for seniors.

Where you live influences how well you live as you grow older - meaning location and environment have an effect on everything from physical safety to mental health to longevity. The more you learn about this, the better prepared you'll be.

Exploring the options and learning more about successful aging can give you the confidence and credibility you need to begin this conversation. But exploring and learning doesn't mean you're making decisions without the consent of your parent or aging family member. Instead, you're preparing yourself to be as helpful as possible for the conversation and decisions ahead.



Tips for a Better Conversation About Senior Care



Once you learn more and feel you can confidently explain the options, following these tips can help you have a productive conversation:

Talk in person.

This isn't a conversation to have by telephone if you can avoid it. Instead, pick a day when you and your parent are well-rested and relaxed. Block out a time and a location where you can talk without interruption.

Empathy, not sympathy.

No older adult wants their child to feel sorry for them. But empathy is another matter. Your kind, calm voice and demeanor will show you care — and that you're trying to understand the fears and frustrations they may feel. The idea of accepting in-home care or moving to a senior living community is tough. You begin to help as soon as you really begin to listen.

Don't rush.

Once you're armed with knowledge, you may feel ready to make a decision. But your parent may need more time. Allow them the time they need to find the words that express how they're feeling. Coming to an unpressured mutual agreement now will continue to pay dividends as you move forward together.

Plan to talk again. And again.

As much as you might want to wrap things up in one conversation, the reality is this will likely be a series of talks. Unless your aging family member is in eminent danger, that's okay. It's a process ... not a once-and-done discussion.



Senior Care Conversation Starters



As with many difficult topics, beginning the discussion is often the hardest part. These conversation starters may help:

How is it living at home alone? Do you still feel safe?

(You may want to mention specific safety concerns such as managing medication, falling on stairs, struggles in the bathtub or kitchen. Crime may be another fear they haven't shared with you.)

Do you feel lonely sometimes? Would you like to spend more time with people your own age?

How do you feel about driving? Would you be interested in other options for transportation, so you don't have to worry about getting where you need to go, car maintenance costs, traffic, parking, etc.?

Is it ever hard to manage your finances and keep up with paying your bills?

Ever wonder about getting a helping hand with housekeeping and laundry?

Would you feel less stress if you didn't have to worry about the house?

Open-ended questions are the best way to encourage them to talk. Sit back and really listen to their answers.



Avoid Information Overload

Finally, beware the flood. Sharing a little basic information upfront can be helpful, but overloading the conversation with research and statistics is overwhelming. What's worse, when people feel overwhelmed, they can get defensive. And defensiveness will end a conversation fast – and make it hard to resume later. Take your time, and make this a journey of discovery and growth.

Sources:

- *Tips & Insight: Ways to Help Your Talks Go More Smoothly*, Genworth Care Talk.
- *Talking with Your Parents About Independent Living*, AARP, May 8, 2012.
- “*The Other Conversation: A Guide to Talking with Adult Children About the Rest of Your Life*,” Tim Prosch.

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