



Oaks
SENIOR LIVING

Tips for Talking With Mom and Dad

Beginning the process and knowing what to expect.



Starting the Conversation

Introduction

It is inevitable as our parents get older, they will eventually be in need of help - it's a fact of life. As we age, we eventually won't be able to do things we once were able to like: driving or taking care of a pet, cooking certain foods or maybe even caring for ourselves. It's in these moments that we rely on loved ones to step in and take over the roles of caregivers or problem solvers and present alternative solutions.

Beginning that process and having those transitional conversations are tough for both parties, and depending on the severity of the situation, incredibly emotional. Chances are your parent feels some level of determination to remain independent and prove you wrong. Try to put yourself in their shoes and relate to being told you can't do something anymore - ever. The finality of that statement is hard to comprehend.

Before you speak to your loved one, consider what kind of communication style you have with them. This will help you prepare for the conversation ahead and give you a good idea of what to expect.



Think back on your life when someone told you, you couldn't do something, how did you react?

Open Communication Relationships

There are fundamentally two types of parental relationships. The first type is an open communication relationship. People who have this kind of relationship can talk freely with their parents about difficult topics. If you think back to growing up, how did you handle conflict with your parents? If you were in trouble, did they mostly listen to your perspective or did they discipline with little communication on your part? Throughout your life, did you feel comfortable asking advice from your parents? Reflecting back on these times will tell you how open your relationship is with them. The biggest differentiator for this communication style is not talking, but listening.

Listening fosters understanding between both parties and makes everyone feel appreciated. Overall, this open communication style fosters honest, robust, and healthy families. Communication is an essential building block of strong relationships and makes life transitions more fluid.

Ideally, this communication style is what you want to strive for and the way you should speak with your parents. However, that doesn't make it an easy achievement

Closed Communication Relationships

Closed Communication Relationships, the second type is a closed communication relationship. While this communication style isn't inherently wrong, it does make talking about serious life transitions a little bit harder than those who share an open communication style. Parents and children who have this type of relationship do not speak about emotional topics often. If they do, it's absolutely out of necessity and is sometimes an awkward exchange. On an average basis, subjects remain light and don't brush serious matters. In particular, the silent generation (born between 1920-1946) prefers not to ruffle feathers or initiate conflict. However, this generation values honest, direct, and in-person communication. Keep this in mind when discussing difficult topics. So no matter what type of relationship you have with your family, how can you make these tough talks with your parents go as smoothly as possible?

Chances are this is the style you are most familiar with as it is more common with older generations to keep emotions to themselves.



Make Sure It's The Right Time

When choosing the right moment to speak with your parent, make sure you can give them your undivided attention and focus entirely on the conversation. Try not to have the conversation in the car, or when you (or they) have future obligations. A quiet moment free of other activities can be the perfect time. Also, avoid talking to them at a time that may embarrass them or put them on the spot in front of other people. You don't want them to feel ambushed or become defensive, so starting a conversation in front of dinner guests may not be the best idea for either party. Taking timing into consideration can make the difference between conversation being successful or unproductive or upsetting.



Keep Your Tone Neutral

It's important to keep your tone conversational and do not let emotions get the best of you. If possible, do not tell them what is definitely going to happen, look for solutions as a team and keep it as a discussion. It's easy to do this if you start with a neutral observation or example, just take care to ensure it doesn't come as a criticism. You shouldn't be the only one speaking, so consider asking them a question as part of the opener. Depending on the topic, say something along the lines of:

MOVING

- "It seems like you aren't getting out as much as you used to and I know that can get lonely. It might be nice to look for a place that gives you some activity options."
- "I know these steps can be a lot to get up and down. Are you struggling with them a lot?"

NO LONGER DRIVING

- "How are you doing with your driving?"
- "I know running errands can take all day and are tiring. Is this something you'd like help with?"

CARING FOR THEMSELVES

- "How are you managing with cooking? I know it's no fun having to cook every day."
- "I just talked to Cindy, and she mentioned her mom just hired someone to help out around the house and loves it."

END OF LIFE

- "I was looking through Jim and I's important documents, and it's time for us to get our wills updated, I made an appointment for next week. Would you like to go over yours as well?"
- "Mom, I've been getting my important documents in order in case of an emergency. I realized I don't have a will or power of attorney drawn up. Do you have one?"

Avoid speaking to them in a patronizing tone or as a child as this will communicate a lack of respect and a need for control. A good rule of thumb is to put yourself in their shoes and think of how you would like to feel in the situation.

BE PATIENT AND KIND

This goes without saying, but have patience and be kind. Make sure they know that you are speaking out of a place of love and concern. Emphasize that you are an advocate for their well-being and that your top priority is their safety and quality of life. Take care to make sure they understand that your suggestions aren't punishments. While you may be discussing taking away things such as car keys or suggesting a move, it's not because they are doing something wrong. Compliment things they are doing well. If your parent gets upset about the conversation, have patience. This may seem like it's coming out of nowhere to them. It also may be one of the first times the parent-child roles are reversed, which can be a shock to your parent.





UNDERSTAND THEIR FEELINGS

As mentioned before, it won't be uncommon to be met with apprehension or flat out denial. Depending on their cognitive abilities, it may be a complete surprise. When someone is caught off guard, it's typical behavior to lash out or become combative. They may be feeling a multitude of emotions including fear, anger, embarrassment, or defensiveness - or all of the above. These strong emotions won't just go away, but you can try to help smooth them over with understanding. Sometimes saying something like "I understand" will make the person feel validated and soften their demeanor.

Validation is crucial when communicating about difficult topics. The bottom line is their feelings are valid and we have not been in their shoes, so we can't fully relate. An excellent way to help validate their feelings is to ask them to list out their apprehensions with the situation. Once you know what they are thinking, it's easy to address them one by one. If your loved one has the habit of shutting down or struggles with opening up, start by asking leading questions. These will vary depending on the conversation.

Understanding their feelings and concerns is a necessary step that you can use to find the best solution for your situation. Once you gain an understanding of their expectations (as long as they are reasonable), you can make more informed care decisions that will lead to everyone feeling better.

Examples of leading questions:

- "Are you worried about.....?"
- "Why do you think.....?"
- "Would you prefer.....?"
- "How do you feel about.....?"

END THE CONVERSATION WITH A PLAN

It's not uncommon to have multiple conversations about a certain topic. However, each time you end a conversation it should be with a plan. After introducing the concept, maybe you agree to research the options, or if you've done research, to explore the different options based on your conversation. Maybe it's scheduling a visit to a local senior living community or reaching out to a meal service provider.

Your next steps will vary depending on the topic of conversation as well as the stage. Be flexible at this step, as it will differ heavily based on how well the discussion goes. This step is also crucial so that in the event of an emergency where your parent can no longer make a decision, you have an agreed-upon plan to reference. While an emergency may change the end goal, it's a great jumping off point to reference.

Whether you are a parent speaking with a child or a child speaking with a parent, no one enjoys "we need to talk" conversations. However, they are a natural progression of life and walk hand in hand with aging.



Look at these conversations as a way to strengthen a family relationship and bring peace of mind to you and improved quality of life to your parent. You should end these difficult conversations with a sense of accomplishment and progress towards the next step.





About Oaks Senior Living

Oaks senior living has been serving seniors and their families for over twenty five years. It is our mission to provide quality assisted living and memory care services in faith-based communities. Being family-operated, we're able to focus on what's important to our residents by enhancing their quality of life and providing peace of mind for their families. We believe in person centered lifestyles, which promote personal choice, provide purpose and celebrate each individual's uniqueness and strengths. If you would like further information on how to successfully navigate talking about senior living with your parents, please contact an Oaks Senior Living community.



CONTACT US

✉ info@oslcares.com

☎ (770) 796-5871

🌐 <https://www.oaksseniorliving.com/>