

It Starts with a Conversation...

Are you worried about having “the talk” with an elder about his or her future? Here are some tips on how to start.

Talk with other family members first. Give everyone a chance to discuss his or her concerns so that you all agree on the need for the conversation.

Decide who should be there. You may or may not want to include other family members, such as siblings. A favorite family member may help ease the tension, but having too many people may feel overwhelming. The elder’s doctor can also help you begin the conversation.

Be prepared. What issues do you want to talk about? If you are proposing a solution to something, do your homework and come with the necessary information.

Find a comfortable place and time. Where does the elder like to relax—at the dinner table, in the garden, or on a walk? It may be helpful to start the conversation there.

Introduce the topic by talking about an article, television show, or a friend whose parent may be having a similar problem. The elder will be reminded that he or she is not the only person whose life is changing.

Don’t assume that you are the only one who needs to talk. You may be surprised that the elder is relieved to start the conversation.

Start with small steps, small decisions, and small changes. If you are worried about the elder’s health, safety, or cleanliness, focus on that particular issue. Don’t overwhelm the elder.

It’s a conversation, not a lecture. Seek the elder’s input and listen to his or her perspective. Be patient. Discuss solutions together.

Respect the elder’s feelings and concerns. The elder may deny that there is a problem. Be supportive and sympathetic. Arguing will just make it worse.

Suggest a follow-up conversation. It’s a lot to take in at once. Give the elder—and yourself—time to think about the options.

End the conversation on a good note. You have made progress just by getting the issues out in the open.