



## Participant Guide

# Difficult Discussions with Aging Parents

# Overview

Planning ahead on how and what you will say to your aging parent is a vital component in talking with your parent about the important events in their life. Learn how to be comfortable having discussions with your parent. We will talk about the changing roles, avoiding confrontation, fear of the unknown, fear of invasion of privacy, what to say and how to say it, the conversation process and more.

## **Agenda Topics:**

- Welcome/Intro/Objectives
- Goals
- Challenges of Having the Discussion
- The Discussion Process
- Barriers to Successful Communication
- Avoiding Resistance to Planning
- Specific Topics to Discuss
- Wrap-up

**Seminar Length:** Approximately 1 hour



## Specific Topic to Discuss

You will need time to cover these topics. Expecting to discuss everything in one conversation would be overwhelming for both you and your parents. Look for opportunities to weave the topics into conversations and later write notes of points to remember.

### Legal Issues

Durable powers for attorney and advance directives for health care are among the most important documents to execute. You can call your company's employee resource service and speak with a consultant who can provide legal information and publications that you may share with your parents. If your parent has complex legal issues related to wills, trust administration or disability planning, consider hiring an elder law attorney.

### Financial Plans

If you and your parent are comfortable talking about money matters, you may want to discuss retirement, savings and investment plans, housing plans, tax liabilities and insurance. If you are not comfortable, suggest that your parent talk to a retirement or financial planner. You will need to know where to locate important financial and legal documents in case of emergency.

### Health Concerns

Your parent may experience increasingly complicated health concerns. You'll want to stay apprised of your parent's health changes medications and treatments.

### Safety in the Home

As your parent's ability changes, make sure his/her home is safe. Walk through the home to see what areas might be a problem. Consider ways to update the house with appropriate technology for disabilities. Your parent may want to consider an Emergency Response System, so she/he can call for help in case of an accident.

### Home Support Services

If your parent is having difficulty with household chores or personal care, you may want to discuss home support services. Home assistance may include housekeeping, shopping, running errands, delivering meals, making home repairs and help with personal care.

### Retirement Options

Working people who retire suddenly without arranging substitute activities may become depressed and bored. If your working parent is planning to retire, you might suggest a gradual slowdown in work hours. Or continued part time employment. Encourage your parent to consider volunteer work. Hospitals, schools, day care centers, nursing facilities, museums, homeless shelters. Many not-for-profit agencies rely on volunteers to supply a major portion of their work force.



## **Housing Options**

Housing options for older adults include staying at home, moving into the home of an adult child, choosing a roommate, or moving into a retirement community, congregate living facility, assisted living facility or nursing home. You and your parent will have to consider availability, lifestyle, health, finances and the level of care that is needed.

## **Loss**

Your parent may be adjusting to changes, possibly including the loss of a spouse or friends, changes in health or independence and adjustment to retirement. It may help your parent to talk with you about these changes. Offer support. Encourage your parent to talk to his/her doctor, a clergy person or counselor. A support group may also be helpful.



## Steve's Story

Steve was visiting his parents one afternoon when a conversation he had several weeks earlier came clearly into focus. His friend Bill's dad had died recently and left Bill with not a clue of what assets and resources were available, where they were or how to access them. Bill's mom did not participate in the family business. As a matter of fact, she had not even written a check in years. Dad took care of everything including mom's credit cards. Bill was still trying to get the legal work done so that he could access funds to pay the accumulating bills for his mother who was too distraught to assist.

Steve decided he needed to begin a plan so that he would not repeat Bill's experience.

"I know that you are only 69 and 70 years old but it's never too early to plan for the time when you may not be able to take care of things. One of you could have a stroke, heart attack or dementia and I would not know what to do."

"What makes you think we couldn't take care of ourselves? Do you think we are old people?"

"Of course not, but you never know what's going to happen. Dad, have you made a will? I wouldn't want my brother Chris to take over like he always does."

Feeling that he had been accused of incompetence, Dad quickly replied, "My possessions are my business! When I want you to know anything, I'll tell you. Until then, this subject is closed!"

Steve felt very badly that his good intentions of being helpful had been rejected.

***How could Steve have approached the situation to accomplish the positive results he had anticipated?***



## Difficult Conversations with Aging Parents

*The following are examples of effective ways to express your thoughts and feelings to older relatives.*

### Phrases that show acceptance

- “I can understand if that makes you angry.”
- “I hear your point of view.”
- “I know that you’re doing everything you can to manage and I respect you for that.”
- “I know you thought things would work out differently.”

### Phrases that show reassurance

- “We’ll try to help as much as we can.”
- “We know that this is difficult for you to do.”
- “Hopefully, you’ll feel more like yourself in a few weeks.”
- “The doctor says that you will be able to walk unassisted in time.”

### Phrases that show respect

- “I can understand why you’d feel that way.”
- “Your opinions show that you’ve thought this through carefully.”
- “Your opinions are important, and your wishes are what we’re striving for.”
- “I hadn’t looked at it that way before now.”
- “I love and respect you and accept your opinion, but I feel differently.”
- “Would you like help or would you like to try it yourself?”

*The following are phrases to avoid*

### Phrases that are patronizing

- “It’s time to take ‘our’ medicine.”
- “Dearie, let me help you get your sweater on.”
- “Mom, I’m the parent now and you are the child.”

### Phrases that take away the feeling of power

- “You need to do it this way!”
- “You simply cannot drive anymore.”
- “We know what’s best for you.”



### **Phrases that create guilt**

- “After everything I do for you, look at the thanks I get.”
- “I can do it but I will have to miss a whole day of work.”
- “You know how much I have to do, but I’ll do that for you.”
- “You think you have problems!”
- “Are you doing what your doctor told you to do?”
- “Why do you always refuse my suggestions?”

### **Phrases that are judgmental and critical**

- “You should sell this house and move into a small apartment.”
- “Shouldn’t you keep your house cleaner?”
- “Mom, you need to act your age.”
- “You are not as careful about personal care as you used to be.”

### **Phrases that withhold information**

- “Mom doesn’t need to know this.”
- “What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her.”
- “We don’t have to tell Dad what the diagnosis is.”

### **Phrases that give false reassurance**

- “Of course, you’ll never have to live in a nursing home.”
- “I promise I’ll never put you in a rest home.”
- “Everything is going to be perfect. No need to worry.”
- “That’s nothing to be depressed about!”



## When it is Time to Move

by Stacey Matzkevich

By preparing, acknowledging feelings, being realistic, and providing choices, you may not be able to make the process of moving pleasant, but you will be able to make it a little bit easier.

There may come a time when care giving at home is no longer an option. Most caregivers are filled with a sense of dread when they think about having this heartbreaking conversation with a person they care about. Both parties, the caregiver and the senior, often have very powerful emotions about this life transition. Strong feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, and grief are common. For many families, this decision is made only after heroic measures have been taken, and they may also feel that they have failed as caregivers. This highly emotional situation makes communication on the topic of moving very difficult.

### Tips for Having a Difficult Conversation

#### “The Right to Folly”

Keep in mind that no one can “force” someone into a “home” or other situation unless that person has been declared legally incompetent or has legally given up their decision-making power. The right to make your own bad choices is commonly called the “right to folly.” This means that unless a person’s ability to make their own decisions has been legally taken away, they can choose to do as they please – as long as it does not cause real danger to themselves or others. Therefore, if you feel that a person is no longer safe in the home, and the person in question refuses to move or make necessary changes, you cannot force them to comply without going through legal channels to have them declared incompetent. This is one of the most difficult aspects of care giving. Nothing is more frustrating than watching someone make bad decisions and refuse needed services. If a person is not declared legally incompetent, you can cajole, beg, and plead, but you cannot force them to do anything. Put simply, no one can “put” someone in a “home” unless the person is willing to go. Furthermore, once the person has moved into an institution, they have the right to leave against all medical advice and reason unless they are declared legally incompetent. Therefore, one needs to become skilled at the art of compromise and communication.

- Be aware that all parties have emotional issues surrounding this decision. This does not mean that you have to address all of these issues and emotions, only that you should first become aware that they exist and can have a tremendous impact on the conversation. This is not going to be easy; be prepared.
- Give everyone a chance to express how they feel about the move. Listen patiently, with empathy and understanding. Do not try to talk people out of their feelings or offer explanations. Do not go into a monologue explaining how much better everything will be when they move or how many friends they are going to make. Just be there for them; as a person who can listen to how they feel and who can understand.





- Give the senior a chance to grieve. Realize the magnitude of the loss and the reality of their loss of independence.
- Do not make promises. One common emotional promise is that you will never put someone in a “home.” A better promise is that you will always do your best to meet the needs of the person for whom you are caring – that you will keep their best interest, and your own interests, at heart. That you promise to treat them, as well as yourself, with dignity, respect, and love.
- Have a script prepared mentally. Review in your mind what you would like to say and how you would like to say it. Keep in mind the issues discussed above, and most important, keep your message clear and simple. By preparing for this conversation, you can give yourself the space and time to deal with your emotional reactions to having to move a loved one. Only by taking care of how you feel can you be supportive and available to the person who is going to move.
- Perhaps there is no choice involved. The senior may have to move because home care is no longer an option. That does not mean that all choices need to be taken away. Everyone, regardless of ability, can be given some level of choice in how the move is to be made. Examples of including the person being moved in the decision – making process include:
  - Giving them two or three options of places to move to.
  - For many, it is important at least to stay in the same community. This is especially true if the person is cognitively intact.
  - Choosing a home that is close enough for friends and family to visit.
  - If culture is important, choose a home that emphasizes the same culture the person is from.
  - Letting them choose what they can take with them to their new home. Favorites include family photographs and trinkets from trips. Do not take items worth a great deal of money, however. Talk to administrators about policies related to personal belongings.
  - Allowing the senior to choose colors and other features of their new home. Many facilities will redecorate to meet the needs of the new residents. Talk to the administrators about customizing their room and making it as homelike as possible.
- Keep in mind that sometimes “happy” is not an option. We, as caregivers, have many difficult decisions to make. We have limited options given the realities of the person’s condition and the available resources. We can do our best to make the person safe and as comfortable as possible. We can do our best to achieve the ultimate goal of maximum independence and choice for the senior we are caring for. However, we are sometimes faced with no-win situations.

Moving a senior out of the home is an emotional time for everyone involved. Take the time to acknowledge feelings, investigate all your options, and realize this is just one of many care giving paths. Care giving is a journey with multiple roads. One road is not superior to another, and no road is a failure.



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**Seminar Title:** Difficult Discussions with Aging Parents    **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_    **Company:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Regarding the Seminar</b>	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1. How well were the seminar objectives met?					
2. Usefulness of seminar information?					
3. Length of seminar?					
4. Effectiveness of exercises?					
5. How would you rate this seminar overall?					

<b>Regarding the Presenter</b>	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1. Presentation skills?					
2. Ability to answer questions?					
3. Knowledge of subject?					
4. Use of time?					
5. Overall assessment of presenter?					

### **Additional Comments**

1. What would you recommend to make this seminar more effective?

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2. What part of the seminar did you find most helpful?

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3. Additional comments/suggestions for speaker's improvement?

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Thank You for Your Feedback!

