



How to have “The Talk” with your parents

Whether you want to talk to them about giving up driving, accepting in-home help, or moving to an assisted living community, knowing how approach the subject and which words to use or avoid will increase your likelihood of coming to a solution together. It is important to realize that this is a time in a senior's life that is marked by many losses which cannot be controlled. Seniors want to maintain their sense of control and dignity in every way possible. Your goal is to balance their needs with their desires and move forward together.

Do your homework; Plan ahead

Before you approach the subject, be sure to research possible solutions. Although you want to have a dialogue (not dictate) with your parent, you will be much more successful if you can help in a way that is better informed. **Watch for signs of an unsafe driver;** not following speed limit (too slow or too fast), flustered by distractions such as a simple conversation, slowed reaction time, getting lost on familiar routes, seeming tense while behind the wheel. Explore other area transportation options. **Observe specific health limitations;** trouble climbing stairs, cooking, managing finances, bathing. Look for signs he or she may not be faring well independently; weight loss or gain, unopened mail, thank-you messages from charities, perishables past expiration date, signs of fire, piles of clutter, cut back on regular activities and outings, plants dying. **Narrow your options;** tour places in advance and present a couple options of places that you think your parents would like. Try to understand where your parent is at in this process before you start the conversation. Start by talking about an unthreatening, yet related, topic. Use phrases like, “How's the house? It must be hard to keep this place in good shape.” Or “How's the car? Still driving into the city every weekend?” If they share concern, or sound interested in your inquiry, offer to help out. Show that you can be a resource, but do not start discussing the bigger issue

at hand. DO NOT say, “Yes, that is a problem. I am going to do XYZ to take care of that for you.” Or “Sounds like it is finally time to move into an assisted living place.”

Start the Conversation

Do not start the conversation on the same day you put out a feeler, if possible. Open with compliments; “I like how you have decided to have two walkers in the house, one on the upper level and one on the lower level.” Leave it open-ended, look for an opening. It leads them to open up the conversation on their terms. Make sure it is a relaxing atmosphere and describe what you are seeing. There are two ways to do this; direct or indirect. An example of a direct approach would be “I see the stairs are getting difficult for you and you almost fell this morning, is that happening a lot?” An indirect approach would be, “Jackie’s mom just got out of the hospital. She broke her hip from a fall in her own home. It made me think about you and those stairs down to the laundry room.” Find the approach that works best for you and your parent. DO NOT say, “You cannot climb the stairs anymore, you are not safe to live here any longer.” As you are listening to your parent’s response, validate what you are hearing. “I hear you saying...*but it’s also worth thinking about...*” Sit down with your parent and make a list of pros and cons, focus on the solution, not the avenue to the solution. Offer to bring your parent to the places you have already scoped out. You value their time and picked a couple that best fit their wants and desires, but be open to touring others if they so choose. Remember that this can be a long process, it is better to start early and have a plan, than to have to find a place to live out of necessity and urgency.



THE LEGACY

of St. Anthony