



Potential Topics of Conversation

The preparation you do ahead of time in these areas, combined with a respectful and supportive approach to the conversation, will go a long way toward a successful outcome.

Knowing what kinds of topics to discuss can also facilitate having the conversation. There are several general categories you can consider covering. Of course, each situation will dictate what is needed. Keep in mind, the desired end results for most aging parents center on feeling secure, maintaining personal freedom, having peace of mind, making their own choices and having friends nearby.

- *Personal & Home Health Care*
- *Transportation*
- *General Services*
- *Housing & Living Environment*
- *Social Networking*
- *Financial & Legal*

The preparation you do ahead of time in these areas, combined with a respectful and supportive approach to the conversation, will go a long way toward a successful outcome. Often the logistics of making lifestyle changes will be daunting for you as well as for your parents. Putting together checklists and easy-to-read summaries or listings of information can help you and your aging parents better understand their options. You can also offer these tools as a way to help empower them to take an active role in making their own decisions.

In some cases it can help to discuss using resources on a trial basis. They don't need to be considered permanent. Recommend trying the services of a resource for a month and see if it is helpful.

A list of national resources to get you started is available on this Web site. Generally the services of state and county agencies or faith-based organizations offer a safe place to start. Beware of Web sites that are trying to sell senior products or services. For your parents' safety, any in-home service should provide background checks and drug testing of service providers.

Personal & Home Health Care

Everyday tasks take more and more energy away from aging seniors. Preparing meals, getting to a doctor's appointment or getting a haircut are all things that may require a shift in the way the tasks are done. Local area agencies on aging are a good place to begin to understand what types of resources are available in your community. Your social or human services agency, your health department, local churches and your local emergency services agencies often provide ways to help aging seniors stay active and independent. Case managers, home care specialists, physicians specializing in gerontology, companies that provide in-home delivery of health care products, parish nurses, and geriatric counselors and therapists are just some of the professionals who can help.

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Transportation

If there is a question whether or not Mom or Dad should still be driving, offering good local options can sometimes help. Having this conversation is often not easy as discussed in another article on this site, "WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO GIVE UP THE CAR?" Look for ideas that still offer as much independence as possible.

General Services

These same state, county and local sources can act as reliable resources for a wide range of other helpful services to meet everyday needs. Help with shopping, errands and special events can also be something for your parents to consider. One family found a great individual to accompany their mom to a family wedding. They were concerned that the rest of the family would be very distracted that day and mom may not enjoy the day as much as she could in the middle of all the confusion. Mom's companion provided transportation to and from the events of the day and was there to make sure she had what she needed to make it a good day for her.

New technologies should also be investigated that can help your parents feel more secure and happy in their own home. Cell phones are a big help. Systems exist to alert first responders to falls or a problem with medication. In addition, computers with cameras on the monitors can now make frequent visiting with your parents online an option for you and your children.

Housing

We'll address the conversation on choices for housing in more detail in another article on this site, "IS STAYING IN THE HOUSE A GOOD IDEA?" However, when starting to look at these issues you may want to gather information to assist aging parents who still believe staying in their home is the best option for them. Consider a local and trusted handyman, yard and garden services, housekeeping referrals, snow removal services, other chore services etc. to start a list of what is needed. When staying in the house is no longer the right option, the choices for senior living communities should also be added to your list for review.

Social Networking

Understanding the importance and role of your parents' friends in their lives should play into conversations and, eventually, choices. Issues surrounding feelings of isolation and depression

should be addressed. In serious situations, a health care professional should be contacted for resources. However, in most cases, local senior centers, recreation centers, senior living communities, churches, hospital senior groups and even banks can provide many options for a wide variety of interests.

Also be careful of automatically bringing Mom or Dad home with you if they decide to leave their home. This can be a wonderful option, but not always the best way for them to stay in touch with friends their age.

Financial & Legal

Adult children of aging parents tell us these are often very private matters for their parents. If you are unaware of your parents' wishes or the plans they have made in these areas, a conversation is probably advisable. These certainly aren't the first topics you will want to bring up and you will want to earn the confidence of your parents before discussing these matters. The approaches we have suggested in the article on this site, "HOW TO BEST GET STARTED," can also help you broach these types of sensitive matters. Some aging parents will not be willing to share this information. But, if possible, you will want to understand how your parents are handling:

- Executing a power of attorney (medical and financial)
- Drawing up a will
- Drawing up a living will that designates their wishes regarding "do not resuscitate" situations
- Understanding any existing trusts
- Location of important documents
- Paying bills
- Tracking credit card payments
- Paying taxes
- Maintaining bank accounts or lines of credit
- Maintaining insurance policies
- Understanding Medicare and Medicaid benefits and legal issues
- Providing for their funeral and burial wishes
- Accessing elder attorney services

As mentioned, this process may take many months to resolve. Setting a definite time every two weeks or so to go through one or two items on your checklist is a way to keep the process moving without causing undue strain on you and your parents.