

How to Have “The Talk” with Your Parents



PATHWAY
to Living

A family guide for those considering assisted living

Introducing a Change for the Better

Making a change—even for the better—is sometimes difficult to do. That’s why it’s important to talk to your aging parents about the benefits of moving to a senior living community, sooner rather than later. It’s better to have the luxury of time to move on one’s own terms than to have to make a sudden move necessitated by health needs.

Through ongoing research and conversations, you can both better understand the benefits that assisted living offers and that moving to a community is about living life to the fullest and remaining as independent as possible. Explore the possibility of your parents having less to worry about and more time and freedom to do what they enjoy. Tell them about the peace of mind that you and other family members will have from knowing that they are living comfortably while safe and secure.

It may take lots of talking and handholding for your parent or parents to warm up to the idea of assisted living and actually make the move. Others take to the notion quickly, even initiating the discussion themselves, and prefer to remain in the driver’s seat throughout the process. The following guidelines are offered to help make the conversation be as smooth and productive as possible for all involved.

Start Talking Sooner Than Later

Don’t wait for a crisis to happen to have the conversation. For example, after a parent falls in the home shouldn’t be the first time you start talking about a move to assisted living. Instead of *reacting* to a situation, be *proactive* and start the conversation before mom and dad need to move.

While your parents are healthy and active, ask them what kind of lifestyle they’d like to enjoy as they age and what their goals are for living and aging well. As a family, you may want to set some agreed upon benchmarks for when the time is right to make a move that is in alignment with your parents’ goals and wishes.

Proceed Slowly and Gently

It’s a conversation that no one looks forward to having with their parents. The unnatural role reversal from “dad knows best” to “daughter knows best” can be awkward and uncomfortable. Most moms and dads still relish their independence and don’t want to be a burden to their adult children and families. Keep that in mind as you work together to find the safest and most fulfilling living situation for your parents.

Do Your Homework

To find the best fit for mom and dad, start by assessing their wishes, needs and situation. Can they live independently in a senior apartment? Would they benefit from some help with daily living and access to social opportunities offered in assisted living?

Get a handle on your parents' financial situation to better understand what they can and cannot afford. Find out if they have long-term care insurance or qualify for veterans' benefits. Next, you can research senior living communities online, talk to friends and neighbors and make personal visits. Eliminate the communities that you know won't appeal to your parents. Narrow the choices for your parents, so they won't feel overwhelmed when it comes time for them to visit.

Make the Conversation Goal Oriented

By involving your parents early on in the process, they will be more receptive to the idea. Have them identify their goals for aging well and then help provide ways for them to achieve their goals. For example, if dad wants to be independent explain that he may have more independence living in a community that offers transportation than he does at living at home without a car.

Get your parents talking by asking questions, such as:

- What do you want your days to look like?
- What type of people do you like to be around?
- What types of things do you want to do?

Listen carefully to their answers to help you understand their goals. For example, if mom says that she'd like to see more people, then ask how she'll do that while living at home alone? Your parents can decide that assisted living is a good choice for them based on their personal goals and desires.

With a goal-oriented approach, you become a personal assistant or advocate for your parents to help them achieve their desires. You become a partner in the process instead of dictating your parents' future.

Overcoming Obstacles

The goal-oriented approach can also work for those parents who are stubborn and resistant to talking. Keep asking questions and be open to options. Many parents may find it difficult to explain why they are opposed to moving. They may fear change and what a new place would be like. Mom may host the holidays and worry about the family tradition. Perhaps dad is worried about finances or is afraid of being abandoned. Address each of their concerns and remind them of the goals they shared. If your parents insist that assisted living isn't the right answer then say, "Let's come up with another option." Mom and dad may want to explore hiring an in-home caregiver.

Help your parents understand the costs associated with each option. A cost comparison chart can help them see more clearly the expenses associated with the different scenarios. Remind them that staying in their home, even if it is paid for, still has a many expenses such as taxes, utilities and maintenance. Ultimately, you want to help mom and dad draw their own conclusions about moving to assisted living.

Take the Show on the Road

Once you and your parents decide that assisted living is a good option, it's time to schedule appointments to visit and tour communities together.

To get a good feeling for the community, stay for lunch and taste the food. Ask how the community will help meet your mom and dad's specific goals. Talk to residents about why they like living there. Check out the public restrooms for cleanliness. Drop by after 5 o'clock to see what the community is like after hours. When it's a good fit, you'll know it.

Let it Percolate...then Try Again!

By starting the conversation early, your parents can take their time to make a decision and choose the best assisted living community for them. If you don't have the luxury of time, you can still talk to your parents about their goals and help them understand how an assisted living community can help meet them. Remember, most big decisions are not made overnight. Be patient and supportive, just like mom and dad.

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