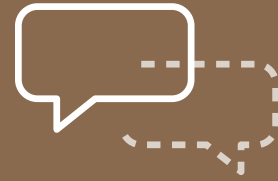


Talking With Parents About End of Life

How to start, what to ask, and how to care for yourself along the way.



Welcome. Asking a parent how they want to be cared for, and what they want at the end of life, is one of the most loving and hardest conversations a family can have. It can stir up fear, grief, old family roles, and disagreements. Use this handout in a group, in session, or on your own.

YOU MAY FEAR

- Making it real
- Upsetting them
- Family conflict
- Not knowing what to say

What
matters
most

THEY MAY FEAR

- Being a burden
- Losing control
- Death or dying
- Being treated as old

Both sides carry fear. The conversation works best when it starts from what matters most, not from forms and decisions.

ILLUSTRATION

When to start: The best time is before a crisis, when everyone is calm. One conversation is a beginning, not a finish line. Small, repeated talks often work better than one big one.

START HERE, 60 SECONDS

Place both feet on the floor. Ask yourself: what am I most afraid will happen if I bring this up? Name it. Then ask: what do I hope this conversation could give us?

IF IT GETS TO BE TOO MUCH

Stop. Look around and name 3 things you can see. Feel your feet. You can pause this conversation, or this handout, at any time.

Please read: this handout is education. It is not a substitute for therapy or medical care, and it is not legal or medical advice. Forms and laws vary by state. Skip anything that feels like too much.



Understand: planning and resistance

UNDERSTAND

What planning includes

Advance care planning means talking about, and writing down, wishes for medical care in case someone cannot speak for themselves. It usually includes naming a health care agent and completing an advance directive. Financial and legal planning sits alongside it. Planning is a process, and wishes can change.

Why it helps families

Planning ahead reduces guesswork during a crisis. In a randomized trial, advance care planning improved satisfaction with care and lowered stress, anxiety, and depression in relatives after a death (Detering et al., 2010). It cannot remove grief, but it can lighten impossible decisions.

HEALTH

Health care agent

The person who speaks for them

Advance directive

Their wishes for medical care

POLST or similar

Medical orders if seriously ill

MONEY AND LEGAL

Durable power of attorney

Someone to manage finances

Will or trust

What happens to property

HIPAA release, beneficiaries

Access to records and accounts

Names and rules vary by state. An elder law attorney or your parent's doctor can explain what applies where they live.

ILLUSTRATION

WHEN THEY RESIST

THEY MIGHT SAY	YOU COULD TRY
<i>Do not talk like that.</i>	I am not saying anything is wrong. I want to honor your wishes.
<i>Let us not do this now.</i>	Could we pick a time this month? Even 20 minutes helps.
<i>You kids will figure it out.</i>	I would rather know than guess. It would take pressure off all of us.
<i>I already took care of it.</i>	That is a relief. Could you show me where things are?

Culture and context: In some cultures, talking directly about death feels unlucky or disrespectful, and decisions are made by the family together. In others, elders expect protection from hard news. Ask how your parent prefers to talk, who should be involved, and which words feel right. Faith and ritual may guide their choices.



Prepare and plan

WORKSHEET

Questions to ask them

Pick two or three. You do not need all of them.

- ☐ What matters most to you as you get older?
- ☐ What would a good day look like for you?
- ☐ What worries you most about getting sicker?
- ☐ Who should speak for you if you cannot? Who should not?
- ☐ What treatments would you want, or not want?
- ☐ Where would you want to be cared for?
- ☐ Which faith or cultural practices matter to you?

Questions to ask myself

Answer these before you start.

- ☐ What am I afraid will happen if I ask?
- ☐ What role do I usually play in this family?
- ☐ What do I need to say first?
- ☐ What are my limits as a caregiver?

WHO SHOULD BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION?

Document check

Track what exists and where it is. Laws and forms vary by state, so check with a professional.

DOCUMENT	DONE?	WHERE IT IS, AND WHO HAS A COPY
Health care agent named	☐	
Advance directive signed	☐	
POLST or similar, if seriously ill	☐	
Durable power of attorney (finances)	☐	
Will or trust	☐	
HIPAA release and beneficiaries	☐	
Funeral or memorial wishes	☐	

Get curious

1. What do I already know about what my parent wants, and how do I know?
2. What do I hope this conversation could give us?
3. Who else in the family should be in it, and who needs to hear it from me?



Have the conversation

COPING TOOLS

2 min



Get Steady First

Before you bring it up.

1. Feel your feet and look around.
2. Name your intention: to understand, not persuade.
3. Ask: what am I most afraid of?
4. Breathe out slowly once.

10 min



Write Your Opener

You keep putting it off.

1. Pick a script below.
2. Rewrite it in your own words.
3. Say it aloud once.
4. Choose a time and place with no rush.

30 min



Have the First Talk

You have picked a time.

1. Start with a story or your own plan.
2. Ask one or two questions from page 3.
3. Listen without fixing.
4. End with one next step and a thank you.

WAYS TO BEGIN

START WITH A STORY

I was thinking about what happened with someone we know. It made me wonder what you would want. Can we talk about it sometime?

START WITH LOVE

I want to honor your wishes, and it would help me to know them. Could we set aside 20 minutes this week?

START WITH MY PLAN

I am working on my own plan and realized I do not know yours. Would you help me understand what matters to you?

If it goes badly: Stop and thank them. A no is information, not failure. Try again later, or ask someone they trust, like their doctor or a faith leader. Their right to decide stays. If a parent cannot make decisions, contact their doctor and consider legal advice.

Care for you: This can bring up grief before a loss, old family roles, and fear. Notice your limits, share the load, and get support of your own. If you have thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 now.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Tools: The Conversation Project (theconversationproject.org). PREPARE for Your Care (prepareforyourcare.org). Five Wishes (Aging with Dignity).

Books: Being Mortal, Atul Gawande (2014). Talking About Death Won't Kill You, Virginia Morris (2001).

Research: Detering et al. (2010), BMJ, 340:c1345. Blackhall et al. (1995), JAMA, 274(10). Kagawa-Singer and Blackhall (2001), JAMA, 286(23).

Therapist or facilitator

Next session

Questions:

soulflotherapy.com/contact

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT RIGHT NOW

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988 **Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

This handout is education and does not replace therapy.