



## **Nursing Home: The Dreaded Conversation**

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Are you worried about your aging parent, but too afraid to have the “Nursing Home Conversation?” Afraid your parent will be angry, uncooperative, or in denial? These are all real possibilities, however, that doesn’t mean you should avoid the conversation. It is never easy, but often necessary to talk to Mom or Dad about the next level of care. Here are some things that can help:

### **Be Prepared**

Get the information you need about their health and concerning behavior. A discussion with siblings or other relatives, health care professionals or a trusted clergy person can be helpful. Determine what is optional and what is non-negotiable. Then consider the logistics of the conversation. All four siblings may overwhelm your parents, and it might not be the best time for the confrontational sibling to lead the discussion. Acknowledge your own feelings and avoid judging your experiences of anxiety, anger, or sadness.

### **Share Your Concerns**

Be direct and caring with your concern. For example, saying, “Mom, we are worried about you living by yourself, we can tell you haven’t been taking your medications every day and it doesn’t look like you are eating properly” is better than blurting out, “Mom, we can’t go on like this, you’ve got to go to nursing home.” Your mother may get angry or dismiss your concerns with a smile, assuring she is just fine. Give her time to digest this, gently go over your concerns, and remember that someone’s first reaction isn’t their only reaction.

### **Listen Without Judgement**

Listen to what your parent has to say, how he or she feels, and his or her concerns. Acknowledge any anger or fear. “I know you’re angry with me for bringing this up. This is hard for all of us.” Some people refer to the nursing home as “God’s Waiting Room,” and that can be depressing and frightening. Others may be upset about the loss of independence, or being isolated. Let your parents know that you understand. Identify the issues and respond in a genuine and caring way.

### **Take Responsibility, Not Control**

Give your parents some choices whenever possible. You are caring for your parents, not parenting them. Involve them in the choice of nursing homes and ask what belongings they want to take with them. Often ask yourself, "Is this worth fighting about?" Some things are and some are not. One woman wanted to know what happened to her favorite Christmas decoration. The family had given it to her grandson, but were afraid to tell her. They eventually got a replacement, but when she found out what happened to the original, she was thrilled that her grandson wanted it. It would have been easier had they been honest in the beginning. It might be easier for you to take over, but give your parents whatever dignity and respect you can.

### **Be Patient and Gently Persistent**

Know that your parent may continue to resist, by being angry, passive aggressive, or in denial. Continue to acknowledge their feelings, and find common ground. "Dad, I hear how angry you are about this, and I understand how hard it must be for you. We have to keep you safe. Remember that you didn't turn the stove off last week, and you've been behind in your utilities payments. We think it's time to get some help. Let's take some time to think about what's best."

### **Remember That Everyone's Needs Count**

Think about your own needs as well as what your loved one needs. If it's important to your parent to be near their old church or neighborhood, then consider it. If it's going to be easier for you to have them in a nursing near you, then consider that as well. Ask how realistic is it for your parent to take advantage of the old surroundings. Assess how much it will save you in terms of time and stress if your parent is closer to you. Acknowledge everyone's needs and then come up with reasonable solutions.

### **Ask For Help**

Avoid doing everything yourself. For example, have one sibling investigate nursing homes, and another to look into finances. There are also professionals available to help you make informed decisions. Enlist the help of a family doctor, a clergy member, or a geriatric specialist. If things aren't going well, overall, or if you are too stressed, find a therapist to help you sort things out, either individually or with the family. This will be a process and it may be a bumpy ride. The ultimate goal is to keep your loved one safe and for you to feel comfortable with their care.

A move to a nursing home is difficult for all involved. It is a worry for adult children who are coming to terms with the decline of a parent. For the parent, it is a loss of independence, a concern about isolation, and a fear of the future. Everyone's needs and feelings should be considered. The "Talk" can be difficult, but necessary; remember to be realistic and caring. This will make it easier for everyone.