



## PREPARING FOR A COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

### 10 Tips on How to Approach a Difficult Topic

Some conversations are very difficult—especially with the people to whom you feel the closest. Prepare well before you discuss a difficult topic. You may be initiating this conversation on your own behalf, or on behalf of another.

To help make the conversation as productive and positive as possible:

1. Come to the conversation with an open mind.
2. Be prepared to do more listening than talking.
3. Be open and direct about the subject and objectives of the conversation. *“I asked you all to be here today, because I have some important things I want you to know about my health and my care.” “We are here today mom, because we are concerned about your health and we want to make sure we know what your wishes are about your care.”*
4. Decide in advance who will facilitate if multiple voices are present.
5. Acknowledge your own thoughts and concerns about this conversation. *“I know this is not an easy topic,”*
6. Also acknowledge the importance of the conversation, *“but this is very important for us to talk about together.”*
7. Be very straightforward with the facts. Do not hide negative information, but also be sure to acknowledge and build on family strengths. *“As time goes on, it might be difficult to stay in this house because of all the stairs, but you have other options. Let’s talk about what those might be.”*
8. Phrase your concerns as questions, offering them tentatively, so that your loved ones draw conclusions and make the choices. Use “what if” questions and “I statements.” *“Mom, do you think you might want a hand with some of the housekeeping or shopping?” “What if we tried. . .” “I wonder how it would. . .”*
9. It is normal for a person to become angry or upset as they experience losses in their health and lifestyle. Acknowledge that you understand, stay calm. *“I understand all this is really hard to talk about. It is upsetting for me, too. But, it’s important for all of us to discuss.”*
10. Leave the conversation open. It’s okay to continue the conversation at another time. *“Dad, it’s okay if we talk about this more later. I just wanted you to start thinking about how you would handle some of these things.”*
11. End the conversation on a positive and grateful note: *“This is a hard conversation for both of us, but I really appreciate you having it.”*

\*\*Use silence and humor, try to see the situation from the others point of view, choose your battles carefully, emphasize the idea that you are a team, always express gratitude for the conversation.



## Understanding the Goals for the Future—A Place to Start

Your conversation about the future doesn't have to focus only on a care plan. You may also consider talking generally about what is most important to you/them as we/they grow older. The following checklist as a starting point to better understand your/their priorities. Start by checking all that apply and then some spend time talking about each one in a little more detail. Ultimately determine which have the highest priority.

- To remain as independent as possible for as long as possible
- To remain healthy and active
- To become more involved in volunteer activities
- To remain in my own home for as long as possible
- To focus on a hobby of mine
- To learn an new skill/hobby
- To work for as long as possible
- To become involved in the community
- To remain as financially independent as possible
- To stay connected to friends
- To take classes
- To create a safety net in the event of an emergency or crisis situation
- To start my own business/find a part-time job
- To move closer to family
- To relocate to a smaller home
- To find help with some maintenance issues
- To retire in a different place
- To travel
- To be able to help my children and grandchildren
- To give of my time in service to others
- To set up a trust in memoriam that will keep giving after I am no longer around.