



Checklist: How to Talk About Assisted Living with an Aging Parent

Talking to a parent about assisted living for the first time is no easy task. It's likely to stir a wide range of emotions for you both. But getting started with these conversations can be easier than you may think. By having a plan in place, you can prevent frustrating misunderstandings and last-minute decisions.

If you're considering talking to your parent about assisted living, here are nine tips for navigating the conversation.



Gather the Facts

Before having the actual conversation, do your homework and understand the options that are available to you. Depending on what your parent has heard about assisted living, they may have some misconceptions about what it actually is and what it offers. Be ready to offer information on:

- ❑ What assisted living is and is not ([it's not a nursing home!](#)¹)
- ❑ [What levels of care are available](#)² and what types of activities and recreation are offered
- ❑ [Cost](#)³ and [how your loved one might pay for it](#)⁴
- ❑ How you will continue to be involved and support them
- ❑ [The peace of mind you both can enjoy](#)⁵

Notes:

1 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/assisted-living-facilities-vs-nursing-home-care-whats-the-difference>

2 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/senior-living-101-which-type-of-housing-is-best>

3 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/7-frequently-asked-questions-about-assisted-living-costs>

4 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/how-to-pay-for-assisted-living-costs>

5 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/5-reasons-why-you-shouldnt-wait-to-check-out-assisted-living>

Get Your Siblings on Board

The best way to reassure a reluctant parent that it's time to consider assisted living is for all siblings to be on board with the decision. So before you talk to your parent, talk to your siblings. Make sure you all can agree, or [find ways to discuss your disagreements](#)⁶ before bringing the topic up with your parent.

- ❑ Plan a day and time where you can meet in-person, video conference, or conference call your siblings.
- ❑ Be prepared for possible objections other siblings might have.
- ❑ Share helpful resources with your siblings.
- ❑ Identify who would like to be involved in having the conversation with your parent.

Be cautious about having too many people “at the table” when you have the initial conversation with your parent. If one sibling seems to have a closer relationship with a parent than others, it may be best to have that person have the initial conversation. You know your family best, so take into consideration how your parent might respond and who your parent will likely respond best to.

Notes:

6 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/5-ways-to-work-better-together-with-siblings>

Make a List

Make a list of your observations and how assisted living might change your parent's life for the better. Have you noticed things such as:

- ☐ Difficulty managing house upkeep and maintenance
- ☐ Decrease in the amount of time your parent spends out of the house
- ☐ A change in your parent's driving skills
- ☐ Changes in your parent's overall health
- ☐ Difficulty keeping up with medication management or changes in medications
- ☐ Decreased social circle
- ☐ Changes to mood

Don't use this list to start the conversation, but it might be helpful if your parent isn't sure why you are bringing up the conversation in the first place. Use the list to talk about the positive aspects of making the move, not to point out their shortcomings and limitations.

Notes:

Practice What You Want to Say

The last thing you want to do is approach your parent with pent-up emotions, so think about — and maybe even practice — what you want to say before you say it. The more comfortable you are, the more likely you'll be able to breathe through awkward moments.

Make a list of questions you can use to guide the conversation. That way you're problem-solving with your parent, not dictating the solution or trying to convince or persuade them, which may come off as pushy and instantly halt the conversation. Questions you can use to guide the conversation include:

- ☐ Overall, how are things going?
- ☐ Are you sleeping well at night?
- ☐ Do you ever get lonely?
- ☐ How have you been feeling?
- ☐ Do you ever wish you were able to spend more time with people your own age?
- ☐ Was your doctor concerned about anything the last time you saw them?

Notes:

Have a Plan

Have a plan for when, where, and how you will approach the conversation. Pick a time when there are no distractions or other obligations, and have the conversation in a casual, comfortable spot, such as at the kitchen table over a cup of coffee. After relaxing and enjoying each other's company for a little while, look for an opening when you can move into a more serious conversation.

- ☐ Pick a comfortable location to have the conversation.
- ☐ Limit distractions.
- ☐ Avoid days where there is a lot going on, such as medical appointments or errands.
- ☐ Pick a time of day where your parent is likely to converse openly with you.

When it comes to picking a time of day, if your parent isn't typically a morning person, a mid-afternoon conversation might be best. If your parent looks forward to your evening visits after you've finished working, then perhaps this conversation is better had in the evening. If medications make your parent groggy or tired as the day goes on, then maybe a morning conversation is best.

Notes:

Be Their Ally, Not Their Enemy

How you approach the conversation can leave you feeling either frustrated or confident about the next step. For many aging parents, initially the thought of assisted living can make them feel like they're being "forced out" of their home or losing their independence.

Be empathetic and try understanding your parent's perspective. Use the information you researched to help your parent to feel like they are in the driver's seat; you're just there to support them. You might say something like: "I know this is hard to talk about, but I want to be sure that I honor your wishes. For me to do that, I need to know what they are. We don't have to decide anything today, but let's just start the discussion so we can keep this in mind and be better prepared for the future."

Notes:

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Practice Your Listening Skills

If there is resistance or conflict, pay close attention to the feelings being expressed, and recognize and respond to the things that matter to your parent. Make sure they feel supported and understood by using reflective listening. Some responses that will help you move the conversation forward are:

- ❑ “I completely understand how you could feel that way. What I’ve found in researching this is ... ”
- ❑ “What is your greatest fear or concern?”
- ❑ “What could I do to help put your mind at ease?”
- ❑ “I want you to imagine for a second ... ”
- ❑ “Some concerns I have are ... [list no more than three]. What are some alternative solutions that would alleviate these concerns?”
- ❑ “I realize this would be a big change. What if we visited some places initially just for you to see what they look like and continue the conversation after that?”

Ultimately, you know your parent best. Ask questions, rather than telling your parent what to do, to prevent your parent from abruptly ending the conversation and being opposed to discussing it again in the future.

Notes:

Avoid Information Overload

Flooding your parent with research and statistics can be overwhelming. If you're too heavy-handed with your idea for them to move to an assisted living community, [they are likely to resist](#).⁷ Instead, identify what information they might find most helpful and focus your conversation there. You might ask questions such as:

- ❑ “What’s one question that comes to your mind about assisted living?”
- ❑ “If you were to consider this down the road at some point, what piece of information would be most helpful for you to have?”
- ❑ “What would be intriguing to you about this option?”

Notes:

⁷ <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/7-ways-to-get-a-parent-to-say-no-to-an-assisted-living-facility>

Prepare for Additional Conversations

A successful conversation about moving to assisted living might happen in a series of smaller conversations. Leaving your parent feeling like you have already made the decision without them is sure to cause some friction and frustration for both of you.

If the initial conversation didn't go as well as you had planned, spend some time reflecting by asking yourself:

- ☐ Is there anything I could have done differently to prevent my parent from becoming defensive?
- ☐ What fear(s) is my parent trying to communicate with me, and how can I put their mind at ease?
- ☐ Who else could participate in the conversation that my parent might respond positively to?
- ☐ What steps can I take to re-approach this conversation in the future?

Notes:

Take Time to Make the Right Decision

As mentioned before, it's important to understand that "The Talk" really isn't a one-time conversation. It's simply the first in a series of discussions. That's why it's important to start the conversation before a crisis forces the issue. The best thing you can do is remain positive and supportive throughout the ongoing discussions about a potential move.

Even if you follow all these tips, your conversations might still be difficult. That's OK. It's about getting it right in the end, not winning an argument right now. So don't give up. Give your parent time to think, and let them know you love them and want them to be happy, healthy, and safe.

Notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.



This checklist is brought to you by Highgate Senior Living, an industry-leading assisted living and memory care provider offering a holistic approach to care. Pioneering change in the senior living industry, Highgate is committed to creating a unique and desirable living option where each resident can live a life of purpose.

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