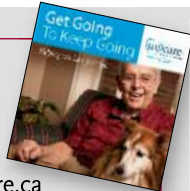


Good advice

Call 877-853-1195 or visit www.wecare.ca for your complimentary copy of the We Care *Get Going to Keep Going* booklet and find out more about how to:

- Get active
- Get happy
- Get to know your meds
- Get help
- Get eating
- Get talking
- Get involved
- Get safe



Tackling tough conversations

When family members and friends are in good health, living independently and coping well, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that it's way too soon to discuss future plans. Some people may be reluctant or embarrassed to discuss personal matters and hypothetical changes, while others may feel that money and health issues are private. Unfortunately, research shows that most caregivers find themselves trying to make difficult decisions without a plan after a loved one suffers a hip-breaking fall, is diagnosed with a chronic condition or has a sudden life-changing incident that compromises their well-being.

The prospect of having the 'tough talk' ahead of time is always challenging, whether you're discussing home safety, healthy



eating, personal hygiene, incontinence or powers of attorney for personal care and property. For many of us, caregiving seems to be fraught with one difficult conversation after another. But there are ways to approach discussions that should make them more comfortable and less invasive. Read on for tips that will help you to discover just what your loved one might want in the future, and we'll also suggest some solutions.

What to watch for



Keep an eye out for signs that it's time to have a serious talk with your loved one. Possible trigger situations may be:

- A fender-bender or near miss when driving
- Loss of a driver's licence
- A fall
- Returning home from hospital
- Illness
- Loss of a spouse or companion

You can trust We Care

At We Care, our compassionate caregivers understand the importance of family and of living at home for as long as possible. Our staff are specially trained to help with Alzheimer's and dementia, diabetes, acquired brain injury and end-of-life care. Services include:

- Personal Care
- Home Making
- Companion Services
- Nursing
- Foot Care
- Live-in Care
- Caregiver Relief
- Accompanied Visits

**All this 24 hours a day,
7 days a week, 365 days a year**

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Talk early, talk often

How do you start to talk to elderly parents about the future?

In some cases, people may be unwilling or unable to talk about next steps. This can happen for a number of reasons, including:

- Dementia
- Fear of becoming dependent
- Resentment toward you for interfering
- Reluctance to burden you with their problems

If this is the case with your parents, you may need to do some of the planning without them.

If your parents' safety or health is in danger, however, you may need to step in as a caregiver. The bottom line is that you need to have a plan. If you're nervous about talking to your parents, make a list of topics that you need to discuss. That way, you'll be less likely to forget anything.

Remember that the consequences of not speaking up are

Active listening

Practice the same habits you would expect from a professional. Consider these *dos and don'ts* to learn more about the root causes of your loved one's anxieties or stresses. Remember: if you strive to maintain their dignity with compassion and respect, they will know that you care.

DO

- Involve them in the decision process
- Provide choices
- Investigate gently and thoroughly
- Look for clues
- Keep track of evidence
- Be compassionate and respectful

DON'T

- Jump to conclusions
- Rush to judgment
- Pronounce a verdict immediately
- Overwhelm with too much information
- Threaten

usually worse than the talk itself. For example, your parent with the erratic driving could hurt some-

one; or your grandparent who forgets to turn off the stove could be injured in a fire.

Plan ahead—not on the fly!

Research suggests that 40 per cent of seniors have at least one disability that affects their activities of daily living, so there may be cause for concern right around the corner.

As loved ones get older, it is important to honour their wishes, their right to make decisions and their need for independence, while at the same time watching for changing needs. Even if your seniors have a 'We can cope on our own' attitude, they are bound to need help sooner or later.

Start now

As you start your journey, it might be helpful to ask questions and learn from other families in the same life phase. Take note of strategies that seem to work for them and look at the resources they have found. Use times of calm to learn, before the pressure

of sudden problems causes stress. In fact, reflecting on decisions made by a neighbour or friend can be the starting point for a discussion.

Don't rush

Think of talking about sensitive topics in the same way as you would learn to swim. You start with learning to hold your breath, then you put your face underwater. Your first step isn't to participate in a swimming competition or triathlon.

It is best to start with small topics, such as getting emergency contact details, doctors' names, prescription information and friends' or neighbours' telephone numbers. Consider breaking the ice by giving your loved one your personal health and contact data, too. Perhaps you can make them into a chart together.

Get going to keep going

We Care's *Get Going to Keep Going* booklet provides families with a positive approach to active aging. This guide outlines a step-by-step way to review key aspects of living independently at home, whether in a house, condo or senior facility.

Build slowly and have short conversations about various aspects of your loved ones' current lifestyle—what is working for them and what isn't. Try to understand their perspective and gently segue into their preferences and the future. What are their likes and dislikes, and what are they comfortable discussing and deciding ahead of time? Here are some of our thoughts on two topics that most of us will eventually have to face: getting help and leaving the family home.

A helping hand

The need for support often comes on gradually and you may want to discuss a few things as you go. Try not to tackle everything at once in an assertive way. Stay calm and choose the most serious or 'at-risk' items to discuss. Share some solutions.

Is there old food in the fridge? Are dirty dishes left unwashed? Is it difficult to keep up with the laundry or carry it upstairs? Suggest that a friendly home-maker comes in to do some of the chores. Can the young neighbour next door help with taking out the garbage? Could someone be hired to take your loved ones to doctors' visits? Could a taxi be arranged to get them to the seniors centre every Thursday in the colder weather? Can your mum go to the hairdresser with a friend? Are your parents confused by a recent change in your dad's cholesterol and insulin levels? Perhaps a nurse with diabetes-related training could pop in a few times a month to answer their questions and check on things.

Tread gently but firmly. Try to be positive and not accusatory. If you can work through concrete situations, you will discover how your loved one feels about having a personal support worker or companion visiting the home. Some parents may be resistant to the idea of having a stranger in their home for safety reasons, so be sure to understand and try to put their concerns to rest.

In addition to being aware that a loved one needs more care, it is critical that other family caregivers, such as spouses, do not become emotionally or physical exhausted. Discuss and find ways to arrange respite care. This is a type of care that gives a supportive break either overnight or at regular times during the week.

Time to move

Leaving the family home after a number of years is particularly stressful for many seniors. But sometimes renovations are impossible or the situation calls for



change. When you can, start discussions before there is a crisis.

Here are some ideas for discussion:

- What does your mom like about her current home and how can you retain some of those things?
- Does she want to stay close by?
- How much money is available and how does that relate to costs?
- Would your mom and dad prefer a house, condo or apartment? Is upkeep an issue?
- What living options are there? Can you tour anywhere together?
- Will transportation be needed?
- Is personal support or nursing care available at the residence?

Don't delay

Waiting and avoiding difficult subjects will not make them easier to discuss. You may need a couple of tries, so don't leave things until it is too late to make choices. It is best to pick a suitable time when you have some privacy and when you are all calm and unrushed. Here are three suggestions to get you started:

1. Choose a topic

Pick an area such as 'will planning' or 'budgeting' where you could use some help. Begin to gather your own information. Take the time to talk to elderly parents thoughtfully, and note what you believe and what your conflicts are. Depending on their responsiveness, keep going and see if you can encourage discussion on

matters and choices that will affect their lives.

2. Test-drive your conversations

Practice the conversation you want to have with a trusted third party in order to properly prepare. Pay attention to what was awkward or difficult. This will help you tune into and respect your parents' hesitation or concerns.

3. Get advice

Ask friends or colleagues for recommendations from their own situations. Ask if they have ever thought about where they will live or who will care for them, or if they have had any of these conversations with their parents. What worked? What didn't? And if their parents are deceased, what do they wish they had known earlier?

It's because you care

When the time comes, you want to be prepared to do the best job possible. Let loved ones know what you have been working on. Suggest that you plan a date to talk about an issue. Ask if they have ever thought about these things and encourage them to chat about or write down their wishes. Awkward conversations are often a family affair, and patience, thoughtfulness and sensitivity from you and the rest of the family is key. Take your time, be aware of your loved ones' fears and, most of all, let them know that you always have their best interests at heart.



One size doesn't fit all

Put what you have learned about your loved ones' life and values to good use. Ask these questions as you think about possible solutions:

- What will give your dad the best quality of life?
- How can he participate in what he enjoys?
- What will allow your parents to have meaning and purpose?
- What can you do to preserve their sense of self-determination and day-to-day control?
- What other family, friends or paid caregivers can be a part of the solution?
- What community resources are available?
- What are you willing and able to offer to the solution?

Visit these websites for more information:

www.talk-early-talk-often.com
www.aarp.org
www.carp.ca
www.wecare.ca
www.solutionsmagazine.ca

Ask our experts

Forward your questions or comments, and we'll ask our experienced nursing team to provide you with the latest advice and information.

My father-in-law has recently lost a considerable amount of mobility and is refusing to go out. How can I encourage him to use the walker we bought for him?

Try to identify your father-in-law's reasons for not wanting to go out. For example, he may be concerned that he is going to fall. Has your father-in-law been assessed for any physical problems related to the recent decrease in mobility? Has a Fall Risk Assessment been completed? Alternatively, perhaps your father-in-law is embarrassed to be seen with a walker or unsure how to use it. Make sure he is comfortable with how the walker works. He might benefit from having a physiotherapist help him at first, to ensure that he is using the walker correctly.

My sister won't discuss her finances or her health with me. She's getting frail and I am her power of attorney. What should I do?

If your sister has chosen you to be her power of attorney then she probably trusts you to make decisions on her behalf. And as long as your sister remains mentally competent, she has the right not to discuss her finances or health with you. Having said that, it would be helpful if you could identify her reasons for not discussing these issues now. Start with her choices for health care in the event that she has a heart attack. Try to discuss these matters in a caring and non-judgmental manner.

What exactly would an in-home assessment involve and what if my parents don't want to participate?

An in-home assessment by registered nursing personnel is an excellent way to ensure that your parents' needs are being addressed. A nurse has the knowledge and skills to fully assess an individual's physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs. This is difficult to do without your parents' involvement and could lead to them refusing care if they are concerned about privacy or assessment costs. (Many nursing agencies provide a complimentary evaluation.) Perhaps your parents' family doctor could recommend they be assessed. Alternatively, order the following brochures to help you and your parents get started.

For a copy of the *We Care Get Going to Keep Going* guide or the *Independent Living Guide* call 1-877-853-1195 or visit www.wecare.ca to find the *We Care* office nearest you.

Attention caregivers

Ask for your complimentary copy of *Solutions*® magazine, courtesy of your local *We Care Home Health Services* location. Visit www.wecare.ca or call 1-877-853-1195.



Send your questions to Julia Sommers at julia_sommers@wecare.ca



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