FAMILY GUIDE

Having the Care Conversation With Your Parent

Practical communication tips for one of the most sensitive conversations a family can have.

By the MedWise Caring care team · Updated November 7, 2026 · Serving families across Massachusetts

THE SHORT ANSWER

Start early, before a crisis. Choose a calm, private time, and lead with what you've noticed and how you feel, not with a decision. Ask your parent what matters most to them, offer choices, and suggest starting small: a few hours of help a week, framed as support that helps them stay independent at home. Expect more than one conversation.

Key takeaways

- Talk before a fall or hospital stay forces a rushed decision.
- Use "I" statements ("I worry when...") and specific examples rather than labels.
- Ask what your parent wants. Their goals, usually staying at home, are the foundation.
- Offer choices and a trial period. Small, reversible steps are easier to accept.
- Get siblings aligned first, and consider asking a trusted doctor to back you up.

Signs it may be time to talk

Changes often come on slowly and are easiest to spot during visits. Watch for:

- Spoiled food in the fridge, weight loss or skipped meals
- Missed medications, or pill organizers that are still full
- Falls, near-falls, new bruises or holding onto furniture to walk
- Unopened mail, unpaid bills or calls about missed payments

- A cluttered or unusually dirty home, or the same clothes worn day after day
- Dents on the car, getting lost on familiar routes, or new worries about driving
- Withdrawal from friends, church, clubs or hobbies
- Repeated questions, missed appointments or confusion about the date
- A spouse who is caregiving and is visibly exhausted

Before the conversation: prepare

- [ ] **Write down specific observations** with dates, not general impressions.
- [ ] **Get siblings and key family members on the same page.** Disagreement in front of a parent derails the talk. Decide who leads.
- [ ] **Learn the options** so you can answer "what would that even look like?" (See our guides on home care vs. home health care and home care vs. assisted living vs. nursing home.)
- [ ] **Understand the budget**, including long-term care insurance, veterans benefits and state programs.
- [ ] **Pick the right moment:** calm, private and unhurried. Not a holiday dinner, and not right after an argument or a fall.

How to start the conversation

Open with care and curiosity, not conclusions. Try openers like these:

> *"Mom, I've noticed a few things lately and I've been worrying. Can we talk about how things are going at home?"*

> *"Dad, what would make your days easier right now?"*

> *"If something happened, like a fall, what would you want us to do? I'd rather know now."*

> *"I want to help you stay in this house as long as possible. Can we figure out together what would make that work?"*

What helps, and what to avoid

Try this	Instead of this
"I worry when you're on the stairs alone."	"You can't take care of yourself anymore."
"What matters most to you?"	"We've decided you need help."
"Would mornings or afternoons work better?"	"Someone is starting Monday."
"Let's try it for a month and see."	"This is how it's going to be from now on."
"It would give me peace of mind."	"You're being stubborn."

Common objections and how to respond

Your parent says	You might respond
"I don't need help."	"You're doing a lot on your own. This is about keeping it that way: a little help now so you can stay independent."
"I don't want a stranger in my house."	"That's fair. We can meet the caregiver first, and you can say no if it's not a good fit."
"It's too expensive."	"Let's look at the numbers together. A few hours a week may cost less than you think, and there may be benefits that help."
"You're trying to put me in a home."	"The opposite. I want to help you stay right here, and having some help is how we do that."
"I'll think about it."	"Of course. Can we talk again next weekend? I'll bring some information."

Start small and keep their control

People accept help more easily when it is gradual and when they keep their dignity and choices. Ideas that work:

- **Start with a task, not a "caregiver."** Help with grocery shopping, rides to appointments, or housekeeping is easier to accept than help with bathing.

- **Frame it as help for you.** "It would really help me if someone was here on Tuesdays while I'm at work."
- **Use a trial period** of a few weeks, then check in together.
- **Let your parent choose** the days, the times and, if possible, the caregiver.
- **Bring in a trusted voice.** A doctor, faith leader or close friend can sometimes say what a child can't.

When memory or safety is the concern

If your parent has dementia, the conversation may need to be simpler, shorter and repeated. Focus on feelings and reassurance rather than logic. When safety is at risk, such as wandering, leaving the stove on or unsafe driving, family may need to act even without full agreement. Do it with the doctor's guidance and as respectfully as possible.

Make sure legal documents are in place while your parent can still sign them: a **Health Care Proxy** (Massachusetts' form for naming a health care agent), a **durable power of attorney** for finances, and a will or estate plan. An elder law attorney can help.

After the conversation

- Thank your parent for talking, even if nothing was decided.
- Write down what you agreed and the next step, and share it with siblings.
- Follow through quickly on anything you promised to look into.
- Check in regularly once help starts. Ask your parent how it's going, and listen.
- Take care of yourself too. Caregiver burnout is real, and respite services exist for that reason.

Frequently asked questions

How do I convince my parent to accept help at home?

Focus on their goals, usually staying at home, rather than their limits. Share specific observations, offer choices, start with a small trial, and frame help as a way to keep their independence. Expect several conversations.

When is the right time to talk about home care?

Before a crisis. Early warning signs include missed medications, falls, weight loss, unpaid bills, a neglected home or withdrawal from activities. Talking early lets your parent take part in the decision.

What if my parent refuses all help?

Respect their right to decide if they can make decisions. Keep the door open, revisit the topic, involve their doctor or a trusted friend, and suggest a short trial. If there is immediate danger or serious memory loss, talk to their doctor about safety steps.

Should siblings be involved?

Yes. Align with siblings before talking with your parent, agree on who leads, and share updates afterward so everyone supports the same plan.

What legal documents should be in place?

In Massachusetts, a Health Care Proxy names someone to make medical decisions, and a durable power of attorney covers finances. Both must be signed while your parent can understand them. An elder law attorney can help.

Questions about care at home? Visit **medwisecaring.com** to talk with the MedWise Caring care team.

Sources

1. Mass.gov — Home Care Program

This guide is general information, not medical, legal or financial advice. Coverage rules and costs change; confirm details with your doctor, insurer, Medicare, MassHealth or an elder law attorney. If you think someone is having a medical emergency, call 911.