



## HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

# *About Senior Living*

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Broaching the topic of senior living can be difficult.

Many adult children choose to put the conversation off. They tell themselves that there is plenty of time to begin a discussion, and that for now, their parents are happier at home. But, circumstances can change quickly. Having a plan ensures both you and your parents can feel confident with the decision when it's time to move.

We have put together some tips and suggestions to guide how you approach the topic and begin an open dialogue.

Whether it is you, a friend, or another family member starting the conversation, you can use this guide to help you get the ball rolling so that you can begin communicating with your loved ones.

## *3 ways to prepare*

### FOR THE SENIOR LIVING CONVERSATION

#### **START EARLY**

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Starting the senior living conversation early gives your parents the power of choice. They will want time to explore their options and to choose a community that best fits their personality and needs. They might want to join wait lists so that when they feel ready, they have the options they want. When you begin the discussion early, you are giving your parents time to make decisions and prepare for their future without feeling rushed.

## RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS

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Options for senior living have changed and expanded. If your parents are more familiar with nursing homes because of their parents or grandparents, they might not know that there are other options available to them. Many retirement communities, while providing some level of care, also offer a residential setting with quality programs, services, and amenities. The goal of these communities is to create connections, purpose, and an active lifestyle.

And some senior living communities have combined services, ensuring those who move in can receive a greater level of care later on if they need it. Knowing these subtle differences can help you steer the conversation toward the type of senior living that best fits your parents' needs.

## TALK TO OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS TO GET EVERYONE ON BOARD

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If you have siblings or other family members who might influence your parents' decision to move, it can be helpful to talk to them first to make sure everyone is on board with your plans to start the conversation. You can also encourage these family members to help move the discussion forward.

## PLAN OUT SOME QUESTIONS AND TALKING POINTS

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Taking the time to think through some of the questions and talking points you might bring up with your parents can help you frame the conversation in a more positive, empathetic light. A soft way to enter the conversation might look like:

*"My friend Mary's mom moved to a retirement community a few months ago. Mary says she loves it! And that she's much happier now because she's more active and social. I'm curious if you've thought through what you want to do?"*

Of course, you might not know anyone who has recently moved into a retirement community. In that case, a different approach could look like:

*(Plan out some questions and talking points continued)*

***“I’ve noticed that the [insert retirement community name here] community hosts a lot of events for their residents during the week. The activities look fun! Have you ever considered what it would be like to live in a senior living community?”***

This strategy allows you to have a more open dialogue about the prospect of moving into a retirement community. It gives you an opportunity to learn about how your parents feel about senior living and how they want their future to look. It can help prevent your parents from immediately becoming defensive or frustrated with the conversation.

## *4 tips for when you're ready*

### TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

Taking the time to prepare can help you more confidently start a dialogue with your parents about senior living. When you feel ready to have the conversation, keep these guidelines in mind to encourage an open and honest discussion with your loved ones.

#### **IT IS OKAY TO NOT MAKE A DECISION RIGHT AWAY** ---

Moving is a big change, and it is important that your parents do not feel rushed to make a decision. Starting the conversation is not about coming to an immediate next step. Instead, having the conversation with your parents early ensures that they have the time to be a part of the planning process and feel empowered to make the choice about this next stage of their lives.

#### **A LITTLE EMPATHY GOES A LONG WAY** ---

Coming from a place of love can help you understand your parent’s point of view and feelings. It can help you move the conversation forward in a way that makes your parents feel heard and respected.

## A CASUAL, COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT CAN HELP EASE TENSIONS

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A formal sit-down with multiple family members could create an uncomfortable dynamic that leads to defensiveness. Instead, consider starting the conversation with just one of your parents, preferably the parent who is likely to be more open to moving. A casual, one-on-one environment can help ease tension and make your parent feel more comfortable with the topic.

*Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, having a conversation with your loved one in-person might not be possible. If this is the case, we recommend using video chat so that all people can still see each other during the conversation.*

## FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVES CAN HELP YOUR PARENTS SEE SENIOR LIVING IN A NEW LIGHT

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When having the conversation, avoid focusing on the downsides of aging, such as the difficulties of getting around or social isolation. If you frame the conversation around the positives of moving into a senior community instead, concentrating on what senior living allows people to do more of, you can help your parents see retirement living in a new light.

### *Taking the next step*

“Starting the conversation can feel like an awkward shift in roles,” says Joan Rettmann, Era Living’s Area Community Relations Director. “But knowing when to get involved, while still respecting your parents’ wishes, can help set everyone up for a healthier dialogue about what’s next.”

You want what is best for your parents. Starting a dialogue on senior living early and in a collaborative way lets them know that you are here to listen and offer support.