



A Guide to Caring for Aging Parents



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A photograph of two women sitting on a patterned couch in a living room, engaged in a conversation. The woman on the left has dark hair in a ponytail and is wearing a light-colored sweater. The woman on the right has short, light-colored hair and is wearing a light blue sweater. The background shows a window with a plant and some framed pictures on the wall. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

1. The Hardest Part: Start the Conversation

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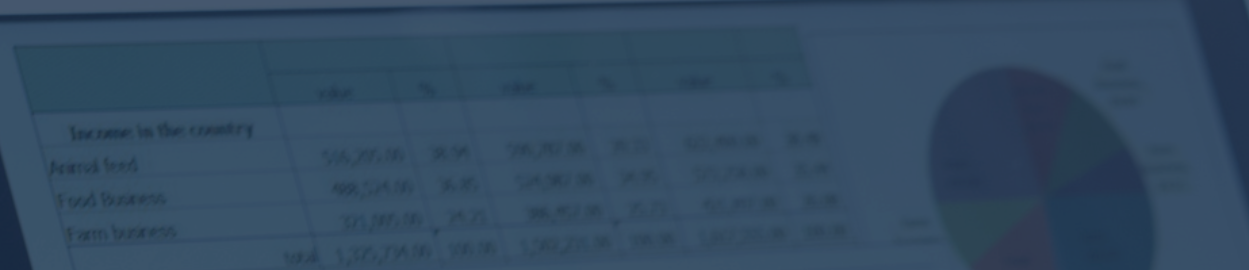
How to Start the Conversation

It's best to start the conversation early. It's important to make decisions with your parents while they still have full cognitive capacity.

- You may mention a friend's experience or article as a way of getting started.
- It's easier to have several small conversations over time rather than one big conversation.
- Allow your parents to set the direction rather than tell them what to do. Phrasing like *"Have you considered...?"* and *"What would you like to do about....?"* can help you find out what your parents are thinking in a respectful way.
- Be their resource and allow independence.



2. Get the Lay of the Land



	2016	%	2015	%	2014	%
Income in the country						
Animal feed	216,275.00	26.38	206,202.00	25.21	202,893.00	24.8
Food business	488,214.00	59.85	548,280.00	66.75	571,288.00	69.8
Farm business	271,297.00	33.21	286,522.00	35.21	312,118.00	38.2
Total	1,275,794.00	100.00	1,299,204.00	100.00	1,486,299.00	100.00



Income	2016	2015	2014
Animal feed	216,275.00	206,202.00	202,893.00
Food business	488,214.00	548,280.00	571,288.00
Farm business	271,297.00	286,522.00	312,118.00



Compile a List of all Individual & Joint Accounts and Liabilities

Understand the entirety of their financial footprint, both individual and joint accounts. Ask how they want you to be involved with their financial life. Gaining visibility to these accounts may take weeks, months, or years depending on how much your parents want to share. Here are some potential assets and liabilities your parents might own:

- Checking, savings, credit union, brokerage and investment accounts
- Revocable (living) or irrevocable trusts
- Retirement accounts: Traditional, Roth, or SEP IRAs; 401k or 403b plans, Thrift Savings Plans (TSPs)
- Pensions and annuities
- Life insurance
- Charitable accounts: donor advised funds, charitable trusts
- 529 accounts
- Mortgages, home equity lines of credit and personal loans
- Credit and debit cards





Get to Know Your Parents' Team of Advisors

If your parents are willing, ask them to arrange a time for all of you to meet their advisors so you may start to understand how the advisor works with your parents and what advice they are giving. Examples of advisors: CPA, trust and estate attorney, wealth advisor, financial planner or investment manager.



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Add a Trusted Contact or Interested Party

- **Discuss adding a trusted contact or interested party** on your parents' accounts.
- **A trusted contact** is someone the financial institution can contact if they suspect financial exploitation or notice signs of cognitive decline that could affect their ability to make financial decisions. A trusted contact is a point of contact and cannot trade, invest, or make decisions about an account.
- **An interested party** can be a power of attorney or someone else with an interest in the account. Interested parties can receive statements but cannot conduct transactions in the account unless they have specific power of attorney to do so.
- These designations are **opportunities to be more aware** of what is happening in your parents' accounts and will allow institutions and advisors to talk to you if have any concerns about your parents. Ask your parents who they are comfortable having in these roles.
- Double checking activity and investments in your parents' accounts will help you have peace of mind that their advisor is steering them in a positive direction with their wealth.



Bill Payments, Both Now and In the Future

- **Gain an understanding of your parents' banking relationships** and how bills are paid, including any automatic payments that have been set up. This often includes utility companies, gas, electric, phone, lawn care, cable, and Homeowner's Association. This may also be a good time to talk about and offer setting up online bill-pay to make routine payments easier for them.
- **Consider beginning the conversation** about how your family will pay for your parents' future medical and long-term care needs. This could be from savings, insurance or government programs (VA health care, PACE/Medicaid).

Medicare

- **Review their Medicare plans**, what their premiums are, and what their out-of-pocket costs have been over the last few years. Ask them how often they review and make changes to their plan as part of the annual open enrollment period.



Income and Cash Flow Sources

Talk with your parents about how much income they have coming in and from what sources (examples: Social Security, pension, annuity, rental properties, and investment income).

Real Estate and Other Assets

- If your parents have owned their home for a long time, be sure they have documented any capital improvements made to the house. Capital improvements increase their cost basis which decreases any potential capital gains if they sell the property.
- Get an understanding of other large assets such as vacation and rental properties, business interests, art and collectibles.
- Do they have any safety deposit boxes? Make sure you know what is in those boxes and how to access them.
- If your parents have personal sentimental items that they'd like to pass on to their heirs, make sure you know who they would like to receive which item and that this list is included with their trust and estate documents.



3. Protect Against Scams

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Private Phone Number

When you are with your parents, are their phones constantly buzzing? Do they mention how many unknown calls they receive? Do they call you in a panic asking if you have been in an accident that didn't happen? These are signs that predators may be trying to scam money over the phone.

One way to prevent this is by helping them **create a private phone number** so scammers cannot reach them.



Use Cyber Best Practices

Make sure your parents understand **best practices** to avoid cyber attacks on the internet. Consider ideas like:

- Enable two-factor authentication everywhere it's offered
- Freeze credit reports at all three credit bureaus. Your parents are probably not looking for credit so it might as well be frozen!
- Sign up for "card not present" alerts to help monitor financial accounts
- Don't send unencrypted emails storing sensitive information
- Don't use your debit card to make online purchases
- Use a secure network. Make sure there's a strong password on the home WIFI and that they are not using public WIFI at the coffee shop etc. for financial transactions.
- Use an encrypted password manager like [1Password](#), [Dashlane](#), [Keeper Security](#), or [Bitwarden](#)
- Beware of phishing and spoofing email, texts, and phone calls. NEVER click a link from an unknown person especially in a text. Remember that government agencies will never contact you by phone or text demanding personal information.



4. Estate Planning

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Estate Documents

- Ask your parents what estate documents they have and/or are planning to create or update.
- If their estate documents have not been updated in over 10 years or they are unsure about where to begin, suggest they arrange a meeting with their trust and estate attorney to make sure their estate plan represents their current wishes.
- Know where your parents' estate documents are located, both the originals and copies.
- Know where other important documents, such as Social Security cards and insurance policies are located.
- Review the beneficiaries listed on your parents' retirement accounts and insurance policies every year.
- Review how all of your parents' assets are titled—ideally everything will be held jointly, in a trust, or with a Transfer on Death or Payable on Death beneficiary designation.
- Need help with organization? Check out the [NOK BOX](#).



Probate

Probate is a public process that is often slow, costly, and time consuming. It also ties up access to accounts until the process is complete.

You can **avoid probate** by adding a **Transfer on Death** designation to accounts that are owned individually; this is just like adding a beneficiary to a retirement account. Assets that are titled in a trust or joint accounts, such as **Joint Tenants with Rights of Survivorship** or **Tenants by Entirety** do not go through probate. (Note: assets titled Tenants in Common between two individuals do go through probate.)



Wills and Trusts

- Know who is **listed as the executor** when your parent passes, and ensure there is/are contingent executors listed. The executor is responsible for seeing the terms of the will are carried out. If you are listed as the executor, helping your parents avoid probate will make your eventual role in closing their estate less stressful.
- Know who is listed as the trustee of the trust, both now and in the event of your parents becoming incapacitated or passing away. Ensure there are both primary and contingent trustees listed.
- Understand how the trust will operate after your parents pass away. Will it be dissolved once the trust assets are distributed? Or will it stay in existence and make regular distributions to beneficiaries?
- Confirm that your parents have re-titled assets into the trust. If the trust exists but there are no assets owned by it, then the trust document is just a piece of paper with no real impact on your parents' estate plan.



Power to Make Financial Decisions

Know who is listed as the agent on your parents' financial **Power of Attorney**, and ensure there is both a primary agent and contingent agents listed. This person can pay bills, move money between accounts, and make overall financial decisions if your parents are incapacitated.

Have you noticed your parent becoming overwhelmed with the amount of mail or emails they receive? If so, see if they would like bills to be directed to their financial Power of Attorney. This can help with making sure bills are being paid on time and important information is secure.



Power to Make Medical Decisions

- **There are 3 important documents for healthcare:** a Living Will, Power of Attorney, and HIPAA Release.
 - Know who is listed as the agent in your parents' medical power of attorney, and ensure there is both a primary agent and contingent agents listed. This person can make decisions about your parents' medical treatment and care if they are incapacitated.
 - Know who has been given the right to speak to your parents' doctors via a HIPAA release. This ensures that if your parents are incapacitated, doctors will be able to speak to the relevant people about the patient's medical situation.
 - Make sure your parents' preferences surrounding end-of-life care are documented in a living will. If your parents do not wish to create a living will, then have a frank conversation with them about their wishes and be sure their medical power of attorney understands these wishes.





5. Aging Care, Retirement Communities, and Downsizing

Please see Important Disclosure Information at the end of this presentation



What's the Current State?

- **Understand what medical state your parents are in right now.** If your parents are willing, attend doctors appointments with them. Since these are personal appointments, make sure your parents know that you want to help them, not invade their privacy or take over their physical health. If your parents want you to join, ask them if they approve of you taking notes and asking the doctor questions. It is important that your parent still feels like they have control over their health and life.
- If your parents consent, have their doctors add you as a trusted contact and HIPAA-authorized person so that you can ask questions about their medical records, if needed
- Having conversations about mental health can be just as important as physical health. Try to be aware of your parents' mental state and check in with them regularly.



What's the Current State?

Understand what is your parents' plan for funding future medical and long-term care needs, including if they have:

- Long-term care insurance
- Life insurance with a long-term care rider
- Health Savings Account (HSA)
- Health insurance (Medicare, Medicaid, coverage from a former employer, Tricare/VA coverage)

Use a tool like [Genworth's cost of care survey](#) to compare the average costs of in-home care, community and assisted living, and nursing home facilities in the area.



What Do They Want? What Will They Need?

- Understand your parents' preferences as they age. Do they want to stay in their home as long as possible? Do they want to transition to a senior living community? Do they want to maintain independence or start relying on more help? The answers to these questions may change over time.
- **Know what level of medical care your parents need.** Do the wishes your parents express align with their actual medical state and what type of support they need to stay safe and cared for?
- Understanding what your parents want and need and having that conversation with them will allow you to find the best way to help them. This conversation can be over a longer period to ensure your parent has ample time to think about what he/she wants and has control over the situation.



If They Want to Stay In Their Home

- **If your parents want to stay in their home,** it is a good idea to have an assessment done to make sure the house is aging-friendly. Renovations and adjustments may need to be done to be sure it is a safe place for your loved ones.
- Make sure you actually can get care from the home health aide or agency you're planning for. There is a shortage of home health workers, and it may be more difficult than your parents think to get care and support at home in their area.
- While it may seem like a good idea for your parents to transfer ownership of their home to you to protect them from predatory buyers, it's not fool-proof. You'll be taking on the liability risk of a home you don't live in and you will lose the step-up in basis opportunity on the property if you could have inherited the house after your parents' death.

If They Want To Downsize

Downsizing a lifetime of collected belongings takes longer than you think. Start early and pace yourself! **There are options on how to approach downsizing:**

- **Do-it-Yourself:** This requires a lot of time and even emotional energy because there is an entire lifetime of items and decisions to make about each one - Keep? Auction? Donate? Trash?
- **Arranging for movers:** There are companies that will assist with sorting what to keep, hauling trash, transporting donated items, and arrange for movers. This can be pricey but does give you a support system and resources. Make sure to hire a professional certified by the National Association of Senior and Specialty Move Managers and check references before hiring anyone.



If They Want to Move to a Senior Living Community

Do thorough research on retirement care facilities. Allow your parent to state their priorities in a senior living community, while also keeping finances in mind. **Consider these questions:**

- What do your parents want?
- As my parent ages, or their health worsens, will they be able to receive an increased level of care at this same facility?
- What amenities are included at the facility, such as social activities and shuttle busses to the grocery store and doctors appointments?
- What are the costs? Upfront costs or downpayments? Ongoing costs? How much do the costs increase from year to year? Are there costs for additional services? Large and expensive does not always mean the best for your loved one.
- Is there a waitlist? Waitlists can be months or years long and can include fees to be on the list itself.
- What kind of medical evaluations are needed to enter this facility? How long will it take for this to happen and for doctors to sign off on the forms?
- Do residents have a caregiver manager? This person should be the eyes and ears of your family and report back to you about your loved one when you are not present.
- Are there limited visiting hours?
- How's the food? **Sounds trivial, but it's not.**



Form a Support Network for YOU

Find your own support network and make sure your parents have the same. Find a group of people who will provide the emotional and practical support you need. Don't be afraid to lean on them and exchange ideas; everyone will get their turn!



Helpful Resources & Links

OFF THE WALL PODCAST: AGING PARENTS:

<https://monumentwealthmanagement.com/resource/caring-for-aging-parents-financial-advice-resources-checklists-more/>

Planning Ahead:

Thinking Ahead Roadmap and Financial Advocate Task List: <https://thinkingaheadroadmap.org/downloads>

From researchers at the University of Minnesota and Stanford Center for Longevity, and funded by AARP; a comprehensive toolkit that guides people to select someone they trust to help manage their money if financial decisions become too difficult in the future.

“Start the Elder Care Conversation” from Kiplinger: <https://bit.ly/3DOotBT>

Nokbox personal file organizer: <https://www.thenokbox.com/>

Protecting Against Scams:

EverSafe – Scans accounts for unusual spending, POA can be notified: <https://www.eversafe.com>

Carefull – Online company that monitors for fraud and financial errors & provides identify theft insurance: <https://getcarefull.com>

2022 FBI Elder Fraud Report: <https://bit.ly/47wrVPd>

Financial Help:

SilverBills – Concierge service that makes sure bills are paid on time and inspects invoices for fraud and error: <https://silverbills.com>

Find a Financial Therapist: <https://financialtherapyassociation.org/find-a-financial-therapist>



Helpful Resources & Links

Legal/Estate Planning:

Off the Wall Podcast – Estate Planning: <https://bit.ly/3KD1dut>

Aging Care, Retirement Communities, Downsizing:

Monument Wealth Management Article – LTC Insurance: <https://bit.ly/47w1mte>

National Association of Senior and Specialty Move Managers: <https://www.nasmm.org>

Senior Move Management Service: Great Falls Organizers | Professional & Estate Cleanout Northern Virginia:
<https://greatfallsorganizers.com>

Genworth Long Term Care Costs by State: <https://bit.ly/3s8HNHm>

Unmet Healthcare Needs and Healthcare Access Gaps Among Uninsured U.S. Adults Aged 50–64:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7215278>

Caregiver Resources:

Geriatric Care Managers: <https://bit.ly/3qtGaUa>

Lighthouse Senior Care: <https://lighthouseseniorcare.com>

Caring Considerations: <https://caringconsiderations.com>






Questions? Get in Touch!

How do you provide your loved ones the care they deserve when your time is at a premium? And when conversations with your parents about finances, healthcare needs, and end-of-life care are so difficult? If you find yourself at this common crossroads, we have you covered. Feel free to reach out to us with questions!

Email us at info@monumentwm.com or Call us at **703.504.9600**



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Important Disclosure Information

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