

## Convincing an Elderly Loved One to Accept Help

For many aging adults, the progressing years represent a series of increasingly hard-to-handle losses: loss of energy, loss of mobility, loss of financial independence. These losses gradually chip away at their sense of freedom and can deal a significant blow to their self-esteem.

Combine that with the fact that well-meaning younger family members tend to offer help in a way that reminds their loved one of their advancing age, and you've got a recipe for interpersonal conflict.

This is the main reason why older people refuse help, and act out when their younger family members offer to lend a hand, according to Oregon State University professor, Michelle Barnhart.

“When we offer assistance to an aging person, sometimes we do so in a way that challenges their identity as an independent adult,” Says Barnhart. “Treating someone as a stereotypical ‘old person’ makes them say, ‘I don’t feel old, why are people treating me like this?’ This.” can

cause serious communication issues.”

Barnhart and her colleagues conducted in-depth interviews with elders, adult children and caregivers in order to examine why aging adults so often reject outside assistance.

They discovered that, when an older adult's identity is threatened, he or she may lash out-engaging in potentially dangerous behaviors to prove their youth.

## 4 Ways Elders Retaliate When Younger Family Members Try To Help

<b>Hashing It Out:</b>	Outright arguments are a common way for seniors to express their frustration at being categorized as old. An elder will try to persuade others that they are not as old or incapable as they seem.
<b>Proving Themselves:</b>	Mark, one of the interviewees participating in the study, repeatedly offered to help Bea, his 82 year-old mother-in-law, with household maintenance that required a ladder because he was afraid that she would lose her balance and fall. Bea responded by rebuffing Mark's request, proudly telling him every time she used the ladder to do something.
<b>Preventing Participation:</b>	When 89 year-old Abbie's (another interviewee) cardiologist started addressing her two adult daughters instead of her during an appointment, she banned them from the exam room. "I wanted to grab him by the collar and say, 'Look talk to me! I'm the patient!'" she says. "But that was easily corrected. They go in with me anymore."
<b>Hiding Their Indiscretions:</b>	After Abbie's daughters tried to get her to stop driving, she would pretend to follow their advice, while secretly driving her sister around.

As a caregiver, your challenge will be to make sure your loved one is safe, healthy and getting the help they need. You need to be able to do this without overstepping your boundaries, which could cause them to become resentful and resistant to your assistance.

Here are some tips for taking charge, without taking over:

- **Ask what they need help with:** If a loved one believes that asking for help was their idea, they may be more likely to accept assistance. If you start off by lending a hand with just those things that your loved one admits to needing help with, they may be more receptive to any future suggestions you have regarding their need for outside assistance.
- **Show Respect:** Respect is the foundation upon which all good relationships are built. Ask your loved one's permission before rushing in to "save the day." Even if you want to sit in on a loved one's doctor's appointment, inquire about their feelings first. If they don't want you in the exam room, wait outside and talk to their doctor about your concerns once the appointment is over.

- **Let them contribute:** Even if a loved one does allow you to assist them with a particular task (say, folding the laundry), let them pitch in. It may make the process less efficient, but being able to contribute can renew an elder's sense of purpose and worth.

But remember, safety should always be your ultimate aim. If you have to assume total control of a task to make sure your loved one is safe, do it with kind and understanding words. Make sure they know you are doing it because you care, and not because you want to take away from their contribution.

## Death, Driving and Dollars: How to Discuss Taboo Topics with an Elderly Loved One

No one relishes the thought of pondering death for too long. Aging adults don't want to consider what giving up the keys to the car will mean for their independence. And, thanks to the prevalence of identity theft, financial information always has an aura of silence surrounding it.

However, as you begin taking on more and more responsibility as a caregiver, there will come a time when you will have to discuss these types of issues with an aging family member.

Here are 8 strategies for discussing sensitive subjects with an elderly loved one:

1. **Don't give advice unless it's asked for:** This is an especially important tip for adult children who are looking after aging parents. Your mother and father are used to providing you with advice and guidance. When this dynamic begins to shift, it may start to lower their self-esteem and make them feel out-of-control. Getting an outside expert-such as a financial advisor, or elder law attorney- to provide professional guidance can make an elder more receptive to new information.
2. **Pick your battles:** It's likely that your loved one needs help with multiple tasks-don't try to tackle all of them in a single conversation. Prioritize your loved one's needs and address them over a series of discussions. This will ensure that each talk is focused on identifying a single problem and all of its potential solutions.
3. **Listen to what they are saying:** Make sure you're really listening to what your loved one is saying. Try not to interrupt, or fill the sentences during a conversation. When it's your turn to speak, summarize what you think your loved one just said and then ask them if you have correctly interpreted their sentiments.

4. **Accept different viewpoints:** Expect and accept disagreements, especially when discussing hot-button topics. Acknowledge your loved one's questions, concerns and viewpoints. Try to come up with a compromise that everyone can accept.
5. **Speak calmly and clearly:** Especially if things begin to get heated, avoid raising your voice or shouting during a conversation. An argument can quickly escalate if either party starts acting flustered. Also, when speaking to older adults with hearing issues, it's important to keep your voice low and to make sure to properly enunciate. This will smooth the communication process by ensuring that your loved one is literally hearing what you are saying.
6. **Don't patronize:** No one likes to be talked down to, especially if they've been living decades longer than the person they're conversing with. Even if you're talking to someone who suffers from Alzheimer's, or some other form of dementia, don't infantilize them by speaking to them the same way you would speak to a child.
7. **Choose your setting carefully:** Plan out where you want the conversation to be held. Pick an area that is quiet and has few distractions (television, radio, too many people). Make sure you're facing your loved one at all times.
8. **Put yourself in their shoes:** Remember, your loved one is probably feeling as though they are losing control over their own life. In their mind, their freedom and independence are being threatened. Be mindful of these feelings and approach the discussion with sensitivity and empathy.

## Keeping the Peace While Discussing Difficult Topics with Family

When a loved one starts to show signs of needing additional care, there are many issues for family members to discuss, and a host of important decisions that need to be made. The gravity and potential implications of these decisions can make for some contentious conversations-even among the most congenial clans.

Here are a few techniques for keeping the peace when discussing an elderly loved one's care needs with the rest of the family:

- **Accept that not everyone wants to be involved:**  
For various reasons, not everyone in the family in planning and executing an elderly loved one's care strategy. Whatever their reasons for wanting to be excluded, it's important to respect their decision. You don't have to agree with it, but allowing resentment to build over unhelpful family members will only serve as an energy drain for those who do wish to provide assistance.
- **Pick a location:** Family meetings should be

conducted in a space where every member feels welcome and comfortable. If the family doesn't have the time or resources to physically gather together in one space, remote conferencing tools, such as Skype

- **Plan ahead:** Pick a set of talking points to cover during the conversation and make sure each point is addressed.
- **Consider outside help:** If you know that your family has a tendency to be and FaceTime, can be used to ensure that everyone who wishes to participate in the discussion is able to do so.

combative, you may want to think about asking an objective third-party, such as a family friend, a social worker or a clergyman, to sit in on the meeting and help facilitate the conversation.

- **Give everyone a say:** All family members should be allowed to voice their opinion and emotions without fear of criticism or ridicule.

## 8 Important Talking Points to Include in a Family Meeting

1	An up-to-date medical report on your loved one.	5	What the primary caregiver needs in terms of assistance and support from the family.
2	The elder's wants and needs with regards to care and support from the family.	6	How much time each family member has to visit, or care for, an elderly loved one.
3	Where a loved one will live (i.e. in their home, with another family member, in assisted living).	7	What other resources are available to help the primary caregiver.
4	How much an elder's care will cost, and how that cost will be covered.	8	Take time to allow each family member to share their emotions about the situation.

- **Identify and outline roles and responsibilities:** An individual family member's role will likely be defined by their relationship with an elderly loved one, how much time they have to devote to helping out, and where their talents lie. For instance, if you have an uncle who is an accountant, but lives in a different state, he may be the ideal candidate to manage your loved one's finances.
- **Summarize the important decisions:** As you would after a work meeting, recap what was talked about and what decisions were made, both verbally and in writing. It may also help to create a calendar that identifies each person's responsibilities and commitments. This will ensure that all family members leave the gathering on the same page with regards to how they fit in to an elderly loved one's care plan.
- **Don't strive for perfect harmony:** Family meetings won't solve every problem faced by family caregivers. Go into a gathering with the knowledge that not all questions are answerable and not all plans will work. Accept the fact that family members will disagree and arguments are likely to break out. This will allow you to keep a cool head and steer the conversation back to the problem at hand, should things start to get off-track.

- **Discuss how to keep family members in the loop:** Come up with a strategy for keeping family members informed of any unexpected changes in an elderly loved one's status or care. This can include actions, such as sending out a periodic Care Report to update everyone on a loved one's condition, or setting up a phone tree to spread the word in the event of an emergency. Also, since family meetings are most effective if they are held on a regular basis, make a tentative schedule for when the family should gather again to re-evaluate a loved one's care.

Despite your best efforts to keep the peace, the challenges involved in planning, paying for and carrying out a loved one's care may still cause some division.

For example, it's not uncommon for siblings to disagree on how an elderly parent should be cared for, or for family members who live far away to be in denial about an aging loved one's declining health.

## How to Handle Criticism from Family Members

It's an unfortunate reality of caregiving that the caregiver will always be a potential target for criticism, especially from family members and friends who don't understand what it's like to provide care for an elderly loved one.

If you find yourself in this situation, there are a few strategies you can use to cope with any sharp remarks:

- **Don't make it personal:** Try to avoid internalizing any insults you receive, whether they come from an elderly loved one that you're taking care of, another family member, or a friend. In all likelihood, the source of their venom has nothing to do with you.
- **Accept that you can't make everyone happy:** It's a cliché, but especially true for family caregivers: if you try to please everyone, you will end up pleasing no one. Family members and friends will not always agree with your decisions regarding a loved one's care. While it's a good idea to take into account the viewpoints of others, it's also important to learn how to trust your gut and stand by your choices.
- **Understand that criticism is inevitable:** No one relishes receiving negative feedback, but unfortunately it's an inevitable consequence of assuming the caregiver role.
- **Turn your frown upside down:** You've probably heard it before, but research has consistently shown that even a fake smile may provide mood-boosting benefits and can help you mentally and physically relax.
- **Don't be a pushover:** Criticism may be unavoidable, but that doesn't mean that you should tolerate abusive behavior. If a family member is consistently hurling hurtful remarks in your direction, calmly tell them that you refuse to be treated that way and physically remove yourself from their presence.

- **Seek support:** Receiving a harsh critique-especially when it comes from a family member or close friend- can be difficult to cope with. Many if those who find fault with your caregiving decisions probably don't fully understand the spectrum of emotions and stress that weigh on a caregiver's heart and mind. It's not their fault; they've just never been in your shoes. One of the best ways to cope with criticism is to find an outlet where you can share your experiences and receive honest feedback from men and women who've been family caregivers before. Online support groups can allow you to tap into an ever-present wellspring of encouragement, inspiration and guidance from fellow caregivers.

It may be hard, especially in the beginning, but eventually you will develop your own process for coping with criticism in a healthy, productive way. Below are some useful links for caregiver support blogs and resources:

<http://www.ecarediary.com/BlogsHome.aspx>  
[Caregiver](http://www.ecarediary.com/BlogsHome.aspx)

<http://www.alzheimersreadingroom.com/>

<http://www.thecaregiversvoice.com/blog/>

<http://www.caring.com/blogs>

[margaretmassey.wordpress.com/](http://margaretmassey.wordpress.com/)

<http://www.conceptsincaregiving.com/>

<http://www.agingcare.com/Life-as-a->

<http://eldercareabcblog.com/>

<http://www.transitionagingparents.com/>

<http://>