

Nine Conversations When Honoring Aging Parents

1. Helping with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs)

- These are key daily life tasks, which are described below: [What are Activities of Daily Living \(ADLs\) & Instrumental Activities of Daily Living \(IADLs\)?](#)
- Older adults often first need help with IADLs, which include things like managing transportation, finances, shopping, home maintenance, and meal preparation.
- An older person's need for assistance with ADLs and/or IADLs often determines what kind of care arrangements or housing arrangements a family might consider.

2. Safety issues

- This includes addressing issues such as financial vulnerability (or even exploitation), falls, driving concerns, and more.

3. Medical and health issues

- Medical concerns are fairly common in late-life. Many older adults have [chronic conditions](#) that require medications, monitoring, and other forms of ongoing management.
- Older adults may also develop new symptoms or health concerns, and may need their family's assistance in getting evaluated. Family members often help bring up questions and concerns to the health providers.
- Most people will also need help when recovering from an illness.
- Serious illness or certain chronic conditions can cause older adults to lose the ability to make their health decisions or oversee their own medical care. Family members must often make decisions due to a health emergency or mental decline.

4. Legal and financial issues

- Seek to gain full disclosure of finances
- Determine how bills will be paid
- Make sure legal docs are accessible (where and how)
- Review legal docs with parents
- Make sure healthcare directives, Financial POA's and wills or trusts are up to date
- Make sure beneficiaries on policies, annuities, IRA's, 401k's, etc. are correct and consistent with wills/trusts
- Some older adults may lose the capacity to manage certain types of financial or legal affairs.

- Even cognitively-intact older adults are vulnerable to financial exploitation.
- Family members must often consider assisting with legal and financial issues.
- Planning ahead and completing the [necessary legal paperwork](#) can make it much easier for a family to assist, if/when it becomes necessary.

5. Housing issues

- An older person's housing situation often affects quality of life, safety concerns, the ability of others to provide assistance, and more.
- Families must often consider questions such as:
 - Is the current housing situation a good fit for "aging in place"?
 - Is a more supportive environment, such as moving in with a family member, potentially necessary?
 - What other options (e.g. assisted living) would be financially viable, and could be considered?

6. Quality of life and helping your older parent thrive

- Beyond meeting basic needs, most families are also concerned about their older loved one's quality of life.
- This means considering issues such as social connectedness, purpose, autonomy, and dignity.
- It's also essential to learn more about ***what matters most to the older person***, and what kinds of things they consider less important or would be willing to trade-off.

7. Planning ahead

- Things to plan ahead for include future declines, emergencies, and [end-of-life care](#).
- Planning ahead tends to reduce later stress, hassles, and sometimes expenses.

8. Managing relationships and family dynamics

- Trying to help an older parent often brings on relationship challenges and difficult emotions.
- Well-intentioned people often inadvertently treat older relatives in ways that threaten their autonomy or dignity, or otherwise strain the relationship.
- It's also common for family caregivers to experience relationship challenges with siblings, a caregiving parent, or others who are involved.
- Most people benefit from learning and practicing better communication skills, to better manage these relationship dynamics.

9. Self-care

- Helping an older parent is rewarding but can easily become a source of chronic stress.
- Because family caregivers are often busy, they can easily neglect their own needs and well-being, which can jeopardize their own health, and also affect their ability to care for and connect with their older parent.
- Family caregivers can use a variety of self-care strategies to keep their caregiving strain manageable. These include joining a support group, asking for help, setting boundaries, allotting time to tend to one's own health and other needs, and more.
- Family caregivers can benefit from learning strategies to organize and prioritize what they are working on.

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs):

A huge benefit to being involved in your parent's day-to-day activities is that you can gauge their ability to take care of essential mental and physical needs. ADLs include but are not limited to:

- Feeding themselves.
- Overall mobility and functionality (getting in and out of bed, sitting down, drinking water, etc.).
- Getting dressed.
- Routinely bathing or showering.
- Maintaining personal hygiene habits (brushing hair, brushing teeth, shaving, etc.)

Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs):

IADLs are activities that are not necessarily fundamental aspects of life, but are important facets of independent functioning. These activities may include but are not limited to:

- Cooking and preparing meals daily.
- Routinely cleaning or maintaining their home.
- Running errands (shopping, getting mail, etc.)
- Paying bills on time.
- Communicating with others via telephone or other forms of technology.
- Keeping up with taking prescription medications.