Daughters of Naomi

Starting the Hard Conversation

Gentle ways to talk with your parent about what's changing.

The conversations you are dreading are far less painful than the ones you will be forced to have if you wait too long. You don't have to have perfect words. You don't have to know how it will end. You just have to begin. — *Becky*

SIX WAYS TO OPEN THE DOOR

1. **Choose the right moment.** Not at the dinner table or during a stressful visit. Try a walk or a car ride. Hard things are easier to say side by side than face to face.

2. **Hold their hand.** It's difficult to become defensive with someone who is holding your hand. Touch says "I'm on your side" before a word is spoken.

3. **Ask instead of declaring.** Questions open doors. Declarations close them.
   Try saying: “Mom, what would make life feel easier for you right now?”

4. **Name the fear.** Behind most resistance is fear of losing independence or being a burden.
   Try saying: “I know this is hard to think about. I find it hard too. But I love you, and I want us to figure this out together while we have time.”

5. **Plant seeds.** You rarely solve everything in one conversation. Say what needs saying, leave it with them, and come back to it.

6. **Keep them in charge.** As long as they're able, involve them in every decision. The goal is never to take over; it's to walk beside them.
   Try saying: “I love you too much to pretend I don't see what I'm seeing.”

YOUR FIRST STEP

The three conversations I've been avoiding:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The one I'll start with: _____ When and where: _____

What I want to say, in my own words:

WORDS THAT HELP

Adapted from Jefferson Fisher, The Next Conversation

INSTEAD OF	TRY
"You are not taking care of yourself."	*"I'm worried about you."*
"Mom, you can't live alone anymore."	*"What would make life feel easier for you right now?"*
Jumping straight to a solution	*"I can see this is really hard for you."*
"Why won't you just listen to me?"	*"How do we figure this out together?"*
Pushing through an argument	*"I love you and I want to keep talking about this, just not right now."*

Not every statement needs an immediate answer. Learning to pause, to breathe, and to let silence do some of the work keeps a conversation from becoming an argument.

IF THEY SAY NO

- **Resistance is almost always fear,** not stubbornness. You're not fighting your parent. You're fighting their fear on their behalf.
- **You can't force a competent adult** to accept help. As long as they can make decisions, even poor ones, they have the right to.
- **Keep showing up.** Keep expressing concern in love. Keep writing down what you see.
- **Enlist allies.** Their doctor, their pastor, a trusted friend. Sometimes a parent can hear from someone else what they can't hear from a child.
- **Ask the doctor about a cognitive evaluation** if you think the resistance may come from memory loss rather than a clear choice.
- **Some seeds take longer to take root.** Sometimes you simply have to wait for the moment when the resistance softens.

If their safety is in immediate danger and they're refusing help, contact their physician, your local Area Agency on Aging (eldercare.acl.gov or 1-800-677-1116), or an elder law attorney about your options.

After we talked: what happened, and what I'll try next time

"Ask Him to give you the words. He will not leave you without them."