
Empathize and Relate

Keep the older adult in the center of the conversation. During the conversation, listen to what makes your loved one feel satisfied, content, comforted, fulfilled, happy, healthy and safe. Have the conversation at a time and place when the older adult feels comfortable and alert. Ensure your loved one has the opportunity to express themselves honestly and without fear of judgement, even if you disagree.

When preparing for a conversation, be ready to listen so you can understand the perspective of the older adult and explore their concerns and/or fears. The possibility of needing support can cause anxiety, resistance or even refusal to have the conversation, which might require you to revisit the topic more than once.

Before initiating a conversation, take a moment to envision your own aging. How might you feel if you lost the ability to do things you can do now such as getting dressed, driving, grocery shopping or paying bills? How might you feel if you had to rely on someone else to help you do those things? Would you want to discuss sensitive and personal topics with someone? Taking the time to reflect on how you want to be treated will provide you with the empathy and insight to help guide you through these conversations. Recognize your loved one as the expert in their aging experience.

Listen

Having conversations about aging can be difficult for older adults as well as family members. However, these conversations are important to learn what aging loved ones want and value and how you can support them as they age. For example, if they need to move to a

supported-living environment, how do they want to handle choosing the setting right for them? What role(s) do they want you to handle? Trust and an open dialog creates the here these valuable conversations happen. To create an open, trusting environment, it is important to let them talk while you listen. Allow them to direct the conversation while you listen and ask clarifying questions.

By listening you create a safe place for them to share their viewpoints, even if they are different from yours. Listen to what is being said as well as what is meant. Continue listening as time goes on because needs and wants can change. Respectful listening leads to respectful action.

Set Expectations

Aging is a complex subject and talking about its needs usually requires multiple conversations. Set the expectation this will be an ongoing series of conversations, and outcomes might change depending on future situations. When setting expectations, be aware there might be resistance because of concerns regarding aging and the acceptance of needing support. The Texas Talks campaign encourages families to use the holiday season as an opportunity to begin or continue conversations about aging. To receive reminders and other information from Texas Talks directly, email TexasTalks@hhsc.state.tx.us and request to be added to the mailing list.

Be Proactive

Discuss potential aging needs and issues before there is a concern. For example, if your family has a history of living into their late 90s, talk about how a long lifespan could impact finances. Or if your family has a history of dementia, talk about how it could impact aging and identify the best legal guardian. If you host conversation about aging proactively and routinely, it will eventually feel more comfortable for everyone involved. When planning, make every effort to encourage hope, choice and self-determination to support your loved one.

Create Action Steps

Having supportive and encouraging conversation about aging will ideally result in action steps. These conversations can make everyone feel better, and it can be a huge relief to have a plan in place. It is important to follow up with questions and concerns when planning logistics. End conversations by identifying items to follow up on, agreeing on the next steps, and noting any topics to discuss later. Also, be honest when requests might take time and when you do not know how or where to go about resolving discussion points.