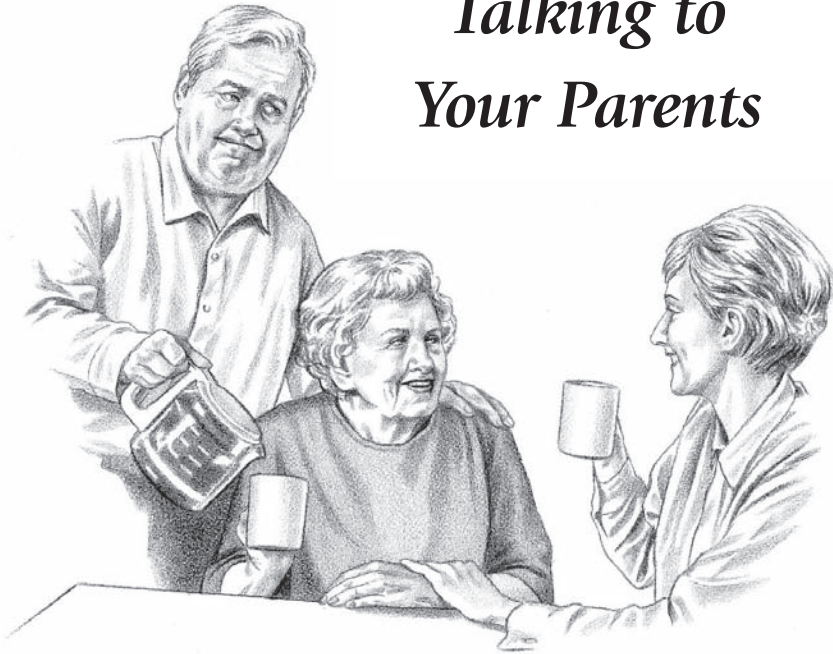


Tough Issues

Talking to Your Parents



Clear and effective communication is vital as your parents age and need help from you. Unfortunately, successful communication is also one of the most difficult tasks.

Assumptions

Many things can interfere with good communication. Two of the biggest stumbling blocks are the assumptions made by both you and your parents about each other:

Your Assumptions about your Parents

You might think you know what your parents need and want, and what is best for them. These assumptions may prevent your really hearing what they have to say.

Your Parents' Assumptions about You

Your parents might think that, since they are your parents, they know everything about you and your needs and wants. These assumptions can keep them from really listening and understanding what you have to say.

Assumptions on both sides can prevent clear and concise communication, and may even result in arguments, anger and resentment. Most importantly, discuss critical issues early, while they are still mentally sharp.

Tips for Communicating

So what can you do to break through the assumptions? What can you do to ensure that the paths of communication stay open? Here are some tips:

Set Aside Appropriate Times to Talk

Set aside a time that is good for all of you to talk. Choose a time when everyone will be relaxed and comfortable—on a Saturday morning or after dinner, perhaps. Make sure that everyone knows that this will be a time to talk—and listen. You may want to ask someone the family trusts and respects to sit in and moderate.

Talk About One Thing at a Time

Try to limit the discussion to one thing at a time. Make a list of related things that need to be covered—and don't start other topics until these have been discussed.

Equal Time for Talking and Listening

Make sure that everyone involved has time both to talk and to listen. You might even consider setting "ground rules," where someone can have the floor to themselves for five minutes at a time, but must then let someone else talk for an equal amount of time.

Avoid Blame

Don't blame others. Even if you think something is their fault, you won't get anywhere by telling them so. Try to forgive—if not forget—so that you can move forward. Stick with "I" messages, such as "I feel frustrated when..." or "I feel sad when..."

Avoid Exaggerations

Don't say things like "You always," "You never," or "I always." These are most likely untrue, and they can only hinder the conversation.

Focus on Problems and Solutions

Take a practical approach to the discussion. Identify problems that everyone agrees on, and then come up with lists of possible solutions. Discuss the pros and cons of the different solutions, and try to agree by the end of the discussion on which ones are most viable.

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