

Starting the Care Conversation

A Brief Guide for Potential Care Recipients

Sean Brotherson, Ph.D.
Extension Family Science Specialist

The topic of needing care from others is not always an easy thing to talk about. It is easy to feel embarrassed or concerned about a loss of personal freedom or dignity. But caregiving is about love. So, think to yourself that you are starting a conversation about love rather than about needing care, and then begin the conversation.

Family members may feel awkward or uncertain about having a conversation with you that is related to providing care for your needs. They may worry about your feelings or be unsure of what you think. You can help them by starting the care conversation. Use the care conversation “starting points” below to think about how you might begin or even to start your own family conversations.

On Health and Caregiving

- “I know that my health needs to be considered in the future and that some needs that I develop (or already have) may require some assistance. Can we talk about my health and what some of my feelings are on this topic?”
- “I’ve been meaning to visit with you about my personal health and any care needs that might arise in the future. What do you think about possible health concerns and how to handle them if they occur?”
- “I’ve been thinking that we need to discuss my health concerns. Is there anything about my health that you’d like to know that would be helpful? Do you have thoughts about how we might deal with any concerns?”

On Responsibilities and Caregiving

- “If my health becomes poor at some point we’ll need to think about how to meet those needs and who can provide care. I have some feelings about that I’d like to share. Could you sit down and visit with me?”
- “I know we’ve discussed briefly what might happen if I ever need care. Could we visit about who and what might be involved?”

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On Physical Issues and Caregiving

- “It’s important to me to care for myself, but I know that may not always be possible. Can we talk about ways to make that situation easier for anyone involved?”
- “I’ve heard that some different types of equipment can really help with some basic physical needs or tasks. Would you help me to learn more about some of those options?”

On Financial Issues and Caregiving

- “I’m concerned about planning for financial needs that might occur if I have care needs in the future. Can you help me explore some of the financial options that are available?”
- “It’s important for us to consider what financial problems might arise in the future if I experience significant care needs. Could we discuss this as a family?”

On Living Arrangements and Caregiving

- “I know I need to think about the best living arrangements for myself and other family members as I move into my later years. Would it be ok with you if I share some of my hopes about my living circumstances and we do some planning together?”
- “I would like to learn more about living options that exist if I ever need some extra care as I get older. Assisted living, living with family members and long-term care facilities all have different components that I need to learn more about. Can you help me get some information that we can learn about and discuss?”

On Advance Directives and Caregiving

- “Being able to know I have taken care of some of the important decisions that might occur if I ever need in-depth care is important to me. I’d like to explore the issues involved with putting together an advance directive if it is ever needed. Would you be willing to sit down with me and go through the process associated with completing an advance directive?”
- “If decisions ever need to be made about my health that I am unable to communicate, I’d like to have peace of mind about who is making those decisions and what has been agreed on. We need to discuss an advance directive process that would make it possible to guide decisions for my health. What are your thoughts and how do you feel about helping me put together an advance directive?”

On Family Relationships and Caregiving

- “I know that life would change for myself and others in the family if I require significant personal care. Can I share my feelings with you about how I’d like that situation to be handled if there is a need?”
- “I would like to discuss how a caregiving situation would affect all of us as family members and see how each person feels. Do any of you have thoughts that you’d be willing to share?”

Conclusion

Although we often avoid it, the experience of caregiving is common in many families and should be discussed. Starting the “care conversation” early can help in understanding feelings, developing plans, and making decisions that will be helpful if there is a need. Take the time to think about and start the care conversation in your family.

For more information on this and other topics, see: www.ag.ndsu.edu