A FAMILY GUIDE · AGING WITH DIGNITY

BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS

7 Gentle Ways to Start the Conversation with Your Parents

A SHORT GUIDE FROM THE BOOK

Aging with Dignity

BRANDON BROWN

BROKER/OWNER · CERTIFIED PROBATE & TRUST SPECIALIST

BayBrook REALTY

A Note from Brandon

Years ago, my wife's grandmother began showing signs of dementia. Stories were repeated, and something that happened minutes earlier might suddenly be forgotten. My wife, with her steadfast patience, said something I have never forgotten:

> *"Our parents, grandparents, and older adults should be able to age with dignity. If that means repeating conversations or listening to the same stories, then that is what we will do."*

That idea became the heart of my book, and it shapes how I help families today.

The holidays bring families back to the same table. For many homes, it's the same table where birthdays were celebrated and holidays happened for thirty years. That makes this season a natural, gentle time to start a conversation most families keep putting off: what Mom and Dad want as they get older, and what should happen with the home someday.

I'll be honest. Even in my own family, we waited longer than we should have. I remember thinking, "I literally wrote a book about this." It humbled me. That is why I put this short guide together.

Preparation is not pessimism. It is an act of care.

You don't have to finish the conversation this holiday. You only have to begin it.

Brandon

BEFORE YOU SIT DOWN

- **Pick a quiet moment, not the main event.** A walk after dinner or coffee the next morning often goes better than the full family table.
- **Talk with your siblings first.** Agree that the goal is to listen, not to decide.
- **Plan on more than one conversation.** You do not have to solve aging in one evening.
- **Come with questions, not conclusions.** If your family has discussed Mom's situation privately for months, remember that she may be hearing it for the first time.

7 Gentle Ways to Start the Conversation

Pick one or two. You don't need all seven in one visit.

1 Start with a story, not a plan.

A home holds decades of life. Begin there, with the memories, before any practical question.

TRY *"What do you love most about living here?"*

2 Ask what matters to them, not what they own.

Approach the conversation from your parent's goals, not your convenience.

INSTEAD OF *"You need to move."*
TRY *"What would have to change for this house to stop working well for you?"*

3 Open the door with your own planning.

It's easier to hear a hard question when you go first.

TRY *"I've been getting my own paperwork in order, and it made me realize I don't know what you'd want if something happened. Can I ask you a few things?"*

4 Ask one question, then really listen.

If Mom says, "I would never want to live in assisted living," don't debate her. Ask what worries her about it. The real concern might be privacy, money, a pet, or losing independence. Understanding the fear can change the solution.

TRY *"What worries you most about that?"*

5 Begin with where things are, not who gets what.

This is the simplest place to start, and the least threatening.

INSTEAD OF *"Where are your documents?"*
TRY *"If something happened and we needed to help you tomorrow, where would you want us to start?"*

6 Keep everyone in the loop.

Parents sometimes tell each child something different, often to keep everyone happy. Years later, everyone remembers it differently. And when nobody talks about who will help, one child quietly becomes the caregiver by default.

TRY *"Could we all hear this together, so nobody's guessing later?"*

7 Agree on one small next step.

End with something simple: find the trust, write down the important contacts, or plan a second conversation after the new year. Then end the conversation. That's enough for one day.

TRY *"This was really helpful. Could we pick this back up in January?"*

IF YOU ONLY ASK ONE QUESTION

"If something happened and I needed to help, would I know where everything is?"

That question alone can open the door to some very important conversations.

The uncomfortable conversation you have today may be the kindest thing you can do for your family tomorrow.

What to Avoid

Older adults can hear these conversations very differently from how we mean them.

WHAT WE SAY	WHAT MOM OR DAD MAY HEAR
"We should talk about what happens if you can't stay here."	*"They want me out of my house."*
"Who has power of attorney?"	*"They think I can't manage my own money."*
"You shouldn't be driving anymore."	*"They're taking my independence."*

- **Don't use fear to force a decision.** The goal isn't "Move now or something terrible will happen." It's "If you choose to stay, let's understand what the plan will be if things change."
- **Don't present a conclusion.** A move introduced gently feels very different from one announced after a crisis.
- **Don't make your parent the referee.** If siblings disagree, work it out between the adults, with help from a professional if needed.
- **Don't argue over guesses.** If one person thinks the house is worth one number and someone else thinks another, get the facts first. Then talk about the decision.

Questions to Bring to the Table

Pick two or three. You don't need all of them.

- ☐ What do you love most about living here?
- ☐ What is becoming harder?
- ☐ What would make you consider moving?
- ☐ If you could not drive, how would you want daily life to work?
- ☐ Who would you want helping with money?
- ☐ Who would you want helping with healthcare?
- ☐ Where are your estate documents?
- ☐ If the home needed to be sold, who should help?
- ☐ Are there belongings you especially want someone to receive?
- ☐ What are you most afraid of losing as you get older?
- ☐ What would help you feel supported rather than controlled?
- ☐ If something changed suddenly tomorrow, what would you want us to know?

ONE PAGE TO FILL OUT TOGETHER

If Something Happens to Me

A one-page starting point for the person who may need to help first. Fill in what you can, in pencil if you like, and keep it with your important records. Tell at least one trusted person where it is.

QUESTION	ANSWER
My full legal name	
Date completed / updated	
The first person I want contacted	
Their phone / email	
My estate-planning attorney	
My financial advisor	
My CPA / tax professional	
My insurance professional	
My real estate broker / property contact	
My primary physician	
My trust / will is located	
My financial information is located	
My digital-access instructions are located	
My home / property records are located	
My health-care directive is located	

THREE THINGS I WANT MY FAMILY TO KNOW FIRST

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Ways I Can Help

If you'd ever like a second set of eyes, or just someone to talk your options through with, I'm always happy to help. No pressure, just honest guidance from someone who has walked this road with many families, including my own.

- Talking through whether to stay, modify, downsize, or move
- Preparing and selling an inherited or trust-owned home
- Understanding what a home is worth today, with no obligation
- Introductions to trusted attorneys, CPAs, and senior-move professionals

WANT TO KEEP READING?

The full book, *Aging with Dignity*, and the Family Preparation Toolkit are free at **baybrookre.com/aging-with-dignity**.

I'm never too busy to help.

Brandon Brown

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BayBrook REALTY

Call or text 949.232.4044

brandon@baybrookre.com

baybrookre.com

Broker DRE #01394509 · BayBrook Realty DRE #02110133

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