

TACKLING TOUGH
CONVERSATIONS

HOW TO
NAVIGATE

5 STEPS IN
CHOOSING IN HOME
CARE SERVICES





Perhaps you noticed dad moved a little slower during your last holiday visit, or maybe you just wanted to check in with your parent to make sure everyone was doing well. Whether you live down the street or across the country from your aging parent, sometimes initiating a discussion around aging is the most difficult step in a series of paramount tough conversations.

A significant element in this series of discussions is your parent's current and future living situation. Today, there are myriad of personal in home care services available and no single, right choice for every senior. There is, however, a key spectrum of time in which to think and talk about this topic: before a crisis.

Dorian Mintzer, MSW, PhD, is a licensed psychologist, career/life transition coach, and co-author of *The Couples Retirement Puzzle: Conversations for Creating an Amazing New Life Together*. She explains how all too often families wait until it is too late to talk about second half of life transitions, "If we're so lucky, we'll have the assurance, freedom, and time to make our own life decisions. When families wait too long to have these discussions, a crisis situation can drastically minimize the senior living options available to someone."

As Dr. Mintzer explains, it is essential for adult children to have this conversation with a parent, even if he or she is healthy.

"In fact, a parent might best continue to live at his or her current stage of vitality longer by switching their living situation before there is a crisis."

– DR. DORIAN MINTZER

"By the age of 65, how we age is made up of 70 percent attitude, lifestyle, spirituality, exercise of body and brain, and only 30 percent genetics. In other words, as we age, 70 percent of our quality of life is made up of things we can control, and one's living situation is part of what we can control."

– DR. DORIAN MINTZER



IN THIS E-BOOK

Dr. Mintzer guides adult children through the tough conversations at each of the five stages in a transition to in home personal care services. Whether you are hoping to have this conversation with one parent or both parents; whether you live locally or far from each other; and regardless of the family dynamic – an only child or large family – this e-book aims to promote proactive conversations to help adult children and parents best prepare for collaborative transitions.

“All transitions have endings, unknowns, and new beginnings.”

– DR. DORIAN MINTZER

Prior to initiating the first of many conversations about aging with a parent, it is important to understand change in general. Take the time to think through how you feel about the future transitions your parent faces and how he or she might feel. Then, think about the major changes you have faced in your own life, and how you felt before, during, and after them. Were you nervous or anxious? What and who helped you through that process? By understanding how tremendous and stressful major life transitions can be, adult children can best show empathy and understanding when initiating these conversations.

LEARN FROM THE PAST

For some adult children and their parents, talking about other difficult topics related to aging and health has gone smoothly in the past. For others, uncomfortable discussions are often avoided. Adult children should think about past conversations. Who initiated the discussions? How did the parent respond to uncomfortable questions? Anticipating how a parent will react and respond to the conversation will also help you best prepare.

ASK BEFORE YOU ASSUME

Dr. Mintzer explains that change is transition, and every transition is made up of endings, unknowns, and new beginnings. Endings mean letting go, loss, and change; unknowns are often made up of leaps of faith; and new beginnings are filled with adjustment. Instead of assuming how your parent feels about change, ask him or her about transitions in general. You might be surprised by his or her answers.

SET A TIME AND PLACE

In an effort to avoid a rushed conversation, or catching your parent off guard, let him or her know ahead of time you want to discuss an important subject. With a heads up, your parent will feel more comfortable and have a sense of control. Plan to meet at a safe place, where you know your parent will be comfortable. For some, this might be at your parent’s home, a favorite café, or meeting in a quiet park for a walk. Wherever you choose to meet, make sure you set aside enough time to talk so you do not have to cut the conversation short.

TOUGH CONVERSATIONS: QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU ASSUME.

Dr. Mintzer recommends asking these questions to help normalize the topic, and to work as a natural segue to the next conversation. Conclude this exercise by recognizing that change can be difficult, but also very exciting, too.



When we moved overseas/across the country, how was that for you?



How did you feel when dad retired?



What was the transition like when you went back to school?



How did you feel when you became an empty nester?

“Life is a series of transitions. Some are clearer than others. The second half of life is filled with more of these unclear transitions, especially as we all continue to live longer.”

– DR. DORIAN MINTZER

When introducing the topic of personal in home care services to your parent for the first time, it is important to remember all the different options available, and to not assume that your first preference will also be your parent's. For example, if an adult child lives far away from his or her parent, the adult child might think the parent should relocate to live closer to them. However, a parent may not want to leave the community, or his or her friends. Remember to keep the spectrum of options in mind, and aim to understand how your parent feels about each one.

SET THE STAGE

Remember, life transitions can be stressful and emotional, especially if that transition involves moving. In fact, a major change in living condition (new home, remodeling, deterioration of neighborhood or home, etc.) ranks 28 out of the 43 most stressful life events on The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory.¹ When talking about changing living situations and arrangements, a parent could also be thinking about letting go of their comfort zones. Find out which part of the transition appears is most difficult for your parent -- that way, you can be especially sensitive as you both begin this process. Empathize with your senior loved one that although the transition to home care services may be associated with many losses for him or her, there are also numerous, and significant, potential gains to focus on as well.

Ask your parent, “What is the hardest part of this for you: the ending, the unknown, or the new beginning?”

LET GO OF EXPECTATIONS

Dr. Mintzer encourages adult children to remember they have already achieved an important goal for this conversation: they initiated it. It is critical in the first discussion to introduce the topic of in home personal care services, free of any agendas and expectations. Do not expect to have a plan or make a decision by the time the conversation ends. Simply be an active participant and listen to how your parent feels and thinks. And remember, there is no sole, correct path when it comes to choosing home care service providers. It is up to you and your parent to find the option that best works for him or her and their unique situation.

USE “I” STATEMENTS

As Dr. Mintzer explains, despite best intents, “you” statements can come across as shaming and accusatory, and can instantly put your parent on the defensive. Instead, she recommends employing the basic philosophy of “I” statements to voice concerns.



TURN “YOU” STATEMENTS INTO “I” STATEMENTS

You can't keep up with the housework



I've been thinking about how big the house is for you now.

You don't get around as easily as you used to.



I worry about your safety.

You shouldn't be driving anymore.



I'm concerned about you driving at night.

Your health is deteriorating



I worry what might happen if you have an emergency and you're home alone.

LISTEN WITHOUT INTERRUPTING

When discussing senior living options, home care services, and the topic of aging, ask your parent open-ended questions as much as possible. And, most importantly, be patient with his or her responses. Be an active listener, but avoid interrupting your parent. If your parent is not actively engaged in the conversation when it first begins, do not be afraid to press for more information by asking him or her to elaborate. For example, “Tell me more about that.” Or, “What do you mean by this?”

TAKE BREAKS

Discussing the transition to senior living options and finding home care services can be an emotional and challenging conversation for both adult children and parents. Consider taking breaks for both parties to digest information and clear heads before returning to the discussion. By pausing to go for a walk together, make dinner, or play a game, the transition dialogue can feel more natural.

CHECKLIST OF TOPICS TO DISCUSS WHEN TALKING ABOUT HOME CARE SERVICES



FINANCES

What is realistic? What is affordable?



LOCATION.

Does your parent want to stay in his or her current community? Does he or she want to move closer to family?



LEVEL OF CARE

Think about the type and amount of support your parent will need. Is assistance with activities of daily living enough support, or will medical help also be necessary?



TIMELINE.

Ideally, when would your parent want to make the transition?

“Even if you don’t agree with your parent, listen and appreciate what he or she is saying.”

— DR. DORIAN MINTZER

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR A MORE PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION.



We had a lot of snow last winter; how was that for you?



What are the easy parts about keeping up with the house?



How safe do you feel driving at night?



What do you like/don’t like about living here?



How do you feel when you’re alone at night?



What do you worry about in this house?



What would your ideal living situation be like in 5, 10, 15 years?



What are your friends thinking or doing about their living options?

For more information about BEAM home care services, visit www.beamforseniors.com/home-care-services

GET CREATIVE

Sometimes a parent's perception may not align with reality, or he or she might be resistant to the overall discussion. Perhaps a parent insists he or she is too healthy, or too young, to want or need the extra assistance home care services provide. If this is the case, consider the conversation in a more creative way with these ideas.



1. GIVE EXAMPLES: If applicable, give your parent specific examples of why you are concerned about his or her current living situation. Maybe he or she frequently has expired food in the fridge. Perhaps he or she is not able to access the second floor of the home due to physical limitations. Giving examples can help your parent better understand where you are coming from with your concerns.



2. SEEK EXPERTISE: If your parent dismisses conversations to consider home care services, or declines to discuss any decline in health or cognitive abilities, consider enlisting the perspective of others—a doctor, neighbor, or friend. Sometimes gathering an objective individual's perspective can help a parent better understand the concerns an adult child may have about his or her current living situation.



3. MAKE IT A GAME: If you are having trouble getting your parent to open up, or to realistically relate to their daily realities, try implementing “The Cards I’ve Been Dealt.” This is a card game created to draw attention to how life transitions impact lives by providing a tool for discovering the nuances of daily living that need to be supported.²

The game, which aims to shape the dialogue between you and your parent, helps extract what is most unique about a person, respecting the individual's preferences and rhythms, and validating his or her emotions by restoring his or her self-esteem. By incorporating the conversation into a game, it might allow your parent to feel less “on the spot,” and help him or her open up about daily realities. To learn more, or to purchase “The Cards I’ve Been Dealt,” visit thecardsivebeendealt.com.

“Tell your parent, ‘I’m so happy to hear how well you think you’re doing, but it would make me feel better if I could talk to your doctor—or a neighbor—to make sure they don’t have any concerns.’”

— DR. DORIAN MINTZER

CHOOSING HOME CARE PROVIDERS



When the initial conversations result in a parent's decision to consider researching home care services, there are a variety of ways adult children can help their parent through the selection process. By lending support and setting up meetings with home care providers, you can help your parent navigate the emotions and thoughts that emerge when researching new senior living options.

AIM FOR VARIETY

Even though you and your parent may have landed on a preferred home care provider in your discussions, it is important that you both consider the variety of choices available, and not make a decision after meeting with just one home care provider. This exercise can validate the initial decision, and at other times, can open up you or your parent to another – potentially superior – option.

PAINT THE PICTURE

Your parent may have trouble picturing themselves wanting or needing home care services during the process. Help them visualize how extra help around the house will allow them even more time in the day to enjoy their favorite activities and hobbies, and maybe even pursue new ones.

OBSERVE AND PARTICIPATE

Throughout the process, encourage your parent to observe, participate, and ask questions. The more your parent is involved in the decision making process, the better off he or she is likely to feel with the final decision once it has been reached. If you have any questions, or are interested in learning more about the full range of services offered, ask the home care provider for the full list of services they provide so you can share with your parent after the tour.

PLANNING MAKES PERFECT

The more your parent can see the benefits of having a home care provider, the more at ease he or she will be with the decision. Before meeting with a home care provider, call ahead to discuss your parent's needs. This will help your parent connect with the home care provider, and feel the comfort and security of having someone nearby who knows their exact, individual needs.

HELP YOUR PARENT VISUALIZE LIFE WITH A HOME CARE PROVIDER:



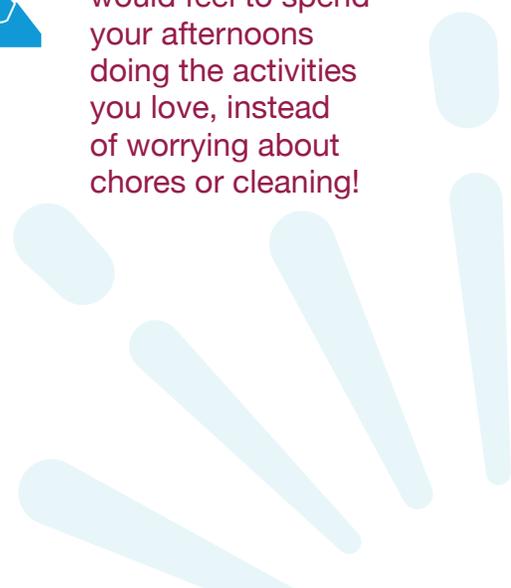
“I know cooking has been a lot to handle. Wouldn't it be nice for someone to help take that burden on for you instead?”



“I know we can't always come visit as much as we'd like. I think you would enjoy the extra company and conversation, don't you?”



“Think how great it would feel to spend your afternoons doing the activities you love, instead of worrying about chores or cleaning!”



ABOUT
**DORIAN MINTZER,
MSW, PHD**



DORIAN MINTZER, M.S.W., PHD, a board certified coach, has more than 40 years of clinical experience. As a therapist, coach, consultant, speaker, writer, and teacher, she brings her expertise in adult development and positive psychology, combined with her personal and clinical experiences, to help individuals and couples navigate the second half of life. She facilitates the “4th Tuesday Revolutionize your Retirement Interview with Experts Series.” She is co-author of “*The Couple’s Retirement Puzzle: 10 Must-Have Conversations for Creating an Amazing New Life Together*,” and is one of the co-authors of *Live Smart after 50*. She is a co-producer of *The Career Playbook: Second Half Plays* e-book and a contributor to a number of books including: *Not your Mother’s Retirement*, *65 Things to do When you Retire* (and its sequel on Travel), *70 Things to do When you Turn 70* and *The Six Secrets to a Happy Retirement*. Dr. Mintzer has been featured in a variety of national and local publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, NPR, ABC Evening News, and The TODAY Show.

Learn more about Dr. Mintzer at www.revolutionizeretirement.com.

ABOUT
BEAM



At **BEAM**, we are passionate about seniors, and encourage each client to live life their way. We also believe each senior deserves to live life with pride, joy, and confidence. The people behind **BEAM** have more than 40 years of experience serving seniors – offering meals, housekeeping, transportation, activities and other supportive services. Now, through **BEAM**, we combine our knowledge and experience to extend a personalized home care service to seniors and their families.

Learn more about **BEAM** at www.beamforseniors.com.

SOURCES:

¹ <http://www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory>

² <http://www.thecardsivebeendealt.com>