

# COMMUNICATION ISSUES

## WORKSHOP FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS



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**As your parents age, communication may become more challenging.** Small disagreements can start out as annoyances, but left to simmer and grow, they can result in arguments or a complete lack of communication that can destroy your last precious months and years together.

Often, communication breakdowns occur because the needs and developmental tasks older parents face are very different from those of their adult children. Understanding these differences and learning to manage them can result in positive, constructive and healthy conversations between seniors and their adult children.

This workshop will help you to open the lines of communication, know which topics are most difficult to discuss, and give you methods to approach them. You will also learn about the barriers to communication and ways to overcome them. Finally, we will point out some great resources where you can seek help and support.

### **Boomers communicate frequently with senior parents by phone and face-to-face.**

Approximately one-third of all Boomers in the U.S. and Canada report that they communicate with their parents one or more times each day. And what do they talk about? In many cases, Boomers are talking to their parents most often about topics that could be classified as everyday things including family, hobbies, work, and gossip. Very few Boomers are most commonly talking to their parents about personal issues such as health, finances, or long-term care. \*



## **OPENING THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION**

### **The 40-70 Rule®:**

- If you're 40, or your parents are 70, it's time to start talking about certain senior topics
- Visit [www.4070talk.com](http://www.4070talk.com) for more information

### **Tips:**

- Slow down and find the time to be fully present and listen.
- Recognize that often it will take more than one conversation to solve an issue.

### **Remember:**

- Go into these conversations with an open mind.
- Pay attention to your senior loved one's ideas and fears they may express indirectly.
- Be receptive to what your parents have to say.
- Try to find solutions that work for all of you.
- Pay attention to their mood; make sure they are feeling well, awake and engaged.
- If you reach an impasse: clear the air, express your frustrations, back off and try again later.

**Notes:**

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## DIFFICULT TOPICS

**The most difficult topics to discuss:**

- Moving from the family home
- Money and Finances
- Driving
- Health Issues
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**Notes:**

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**Baby Boomers have the most trouble discussing “independence” issues with their senior parents.**

While a majority of Boomers expressed general satisfaction with their overall communication with their parents, there are roadblocks when it comes to issues which may threaten a parent’s freedom and independence. Telling their parents that they have to leave their home and removing driving privileges are the topics more Boomers in the U.S. and Canada said would be the most difficult for them to speak to their parents about. \*

## METHODS OF APPROACH

- Be mindful of your approach and speaking methods.
- Move toward solutions that provide the maximum amount of independence for the older person.
- Look for answers that optimize strengths and desires.
- Remember that you are talking to an adult, not a child.
- Not everything needs to be solved right away.

*Put yourself in your parents' shoes and think of how you would want to be addressed in the situation.*

## T.E.M.P.O.

**T**iming – time your conversations appropriately, make sure your parent has time to talk.

**E**xperience – open the door to talk to elderly parents by tying your specific topic to direct experience (e.g. if you just updated your will, ask your parents if their needs updating too).

**M**otivation – be clear about your own motives for asking to have a conversation. If you are annoyed, frustrated or angry it definitely is not the time to engage in an important conversation.

**P**lace – be sure to create a safe space to have an important conversation (e.g. a quiet restaurant, or with a trusted family member or friend).

**O**utcome – you are trying to establish an ongoing, honest conversation about everything related to your parent's future. You don't need to get the answer you want today. Lay the groundwork to understand your parent's feeling, wishes and needs.

## Notes:

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### Baby Boomers say that their approach to communicating with their parents about difficult issues can make a difference.

Seven in ten Boomers in the U.S. (six in ten Boomers in Canada) said that it would be helpful for them to involve their siblings or other family members when approaching parents. Half of the Boomers in the U.S. (approximately 40 percent in Canada) feel that researching the topic first before addressing it, and incorporating a sense of humor, would help them with parental conversations. \*



Source: [www.talk-early-talk-often.com](http://www.talk-early-talk-often.com)

Barriers	Ways to Overcome Them
Hearing loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be patient and speak more clearly</li> <li>• Face the person when you talk</li> <li>• Avoid talking while you eat</li> <li>• Consider an assistive listening device to improve communication by phone</li> </ul>
Vision loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't take it personally if the elderly person doesn't recognize you right away</li> <li>• Be aware when the elderly person becomes tired and wants the visit to end</li> </ul>
Age-related memory loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep in mind that the elderly person may not recall recent events</li> <li>• Be patient</li> </ul>
Parent/child relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand your different perspectives – adult children are used to completing tasks quickly and efficiently; by contrast elderly parents are letting go of duties and responsibilities as they settle into retirement</li> </ul>
Refusal to communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlist the support of other family members, friends, and trusted medical advisors</li> </ul>

**Notes:**

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## TAKING ACTION

Talking with your senior loved ones can be challenging, but when practiced with the tools we've outlined, can lead to rewarding conversations and the development of meaningful and loving bonds that last a lifetime.

**Think about your next steps, and how you can create your own action plan:**

1. One topic or difficult conversation I've been avoiding is:
2. Resources I need to search, talk to, or meet with before having the conversation are:
3. My TEMPO strategy is:
4. My personal deadline for having the first conversation with my mom and/or dad is:

**Action plan:**

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\* Statistics are from the survey "Parents and Boomers: The Conversation Gap", conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care network, 2006.

# DO YOUR RESEARCH

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Don't let a lack of knowledge about senior issues keep you from communicating with your parents. There are a multitude of books, services, and Internet sites dedicated exactly to helping adult children deal with their aging parents' needs. A little research will go a long way.

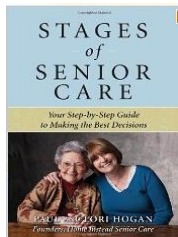
## Websites:

- [www.4070talk.com](http://www.4070talk.com) (The 40-70 Rule)
- [www.talk-early-talk-often.com](http://www.talk-early-talk-often.com) (T.E.M.P.O.)
- [www.caring.com](http://www.caring.com) - lets you set up a customized profile based on your own family situation, (e.g. caring for a parent with Alzheimer's), there are "To Do" lists based on your profile, Caregiver forums, and more
- [www.dramycaregiving.com](http://www.dramycaregiving.com) - Dr. Amy is a recognized expert in the areas of caregiving and aging, this site has lots of information and articles to support the emotional needs of caregivers, plus books and CDs, link to the Eldercare Locator to search for government agencies in your local area
- [www.homeinstead.com](http://www.homeinstead.com) (or in your phone book)

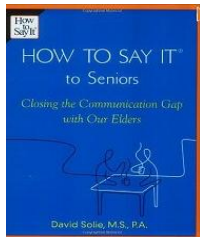
Also, check local, state, and national government and nonprofit agencies

## Books:

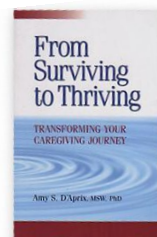
*"Stages of Senior Care"*  
Paul and Lori Hogan



*"How to Say It to Seniors"*  
David Solie



*"From Surviving to Thriving"*  
Dr. Amy D'Aprix



## Other resources:

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