

# AGING *Well*

## PODCAST

### *Family Conversation Guide*

*How to talk with siblings about your aging parent*



Mom is getting older and needs help, but you and your siblings don't agree about what to do.

Now what?

Juggling sibling dynamics while trying to support your aging parent is not easy. Below are recommendations regarding how to communicate during this emotional time of change.

#### 1) Set the Tone

##### **Have a 40/70 conversation before the first sibling meeting.**

Before having a conversation with your siblings about “how to take care of mom,” make sure you know what mom wants. To have a ‘40/70 conversation’ with a parent means that when you are in your 40s speak with your parent, most likely in their 70s, about how they envision growing older.

By this time, your parent should have completed necessary documentation, such as advanced medical directives, a living will, and healthcare proxy, and they have designated a power of attorney. It's best if all siblings are part of this critical conversation so all are aware of what they want, and why.

##### **Tip: Let go of unrelated sibling issues and focus on doing what is best for your parent**

Begin your first sibling conversation by stating the obvious: you all care about you parent and together, you want to support them. Do your best to keep your emotions in check.

## 2) Create an Agenda with Key Topics

### The first sibling meeting should be in-person with a detailed agenda

Tone and intention can get lost in quick text messages and emails, so the first meeting to discuss how to support a parent should happen in person. Before the meeting, create an agenda to help guide the conversation and ensure key topics are covered.

*Examples of key topics to include on the agenda:*

Topic	Questions to Ask
Parents’ Wishes	“What does Mom/Dad want regarding care, home, and independence?” “Have they completed legal documents (POA, healthcare proxy)?”
Care Needs	“What does a typical day look like for Mom/Dad?” “What are their current and future needs?”
Division of Labor	“Who can take on which tasks?” “What are your work and personal constraints?”
Financial Planning	“What are the available resources (savings, insurance, benefits)?” “How do we want to track shared expenses?”
Crisis Planning	“What’s the plan if Mom/Dad falls or gets seriously ill?” “Who’s the emergency contact?”

**Tip: Share the agenda with your siblings before the meeting so they can think about these questions before the conversation.**

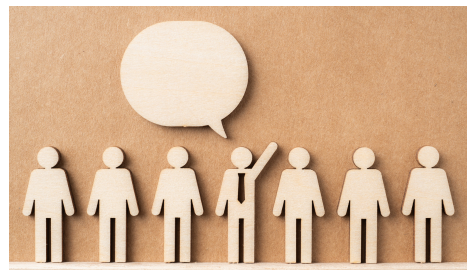
## 3) Establish Ground Rules for Discussion

### Before you begin a discussion, share ground rules to keep the conversation respectful and kind.

Talking about how to care for a parent can be a difficult conversation, and everyone won’t agree all the time. Remember to keep your parents’ wishes as the basis of your conversation, and it helps to assume everyone has positive intentions.

Examples of ground rules:

- Listen fully before responding.
- Assume good intentions.
- Keep the focus on your parent's well-being.
- Take breaks if emotions get high.



**Tip: Avoid “I” statements whenever possible, and instead use “we” so all feel included in the care of your parent.**

#### 4) Develop a Communication Plan

Creating a good communication plan is key when working with your siblings to provide support to a parent, so decide how you will communicate, and how often. Make sure to create this plan before a crisis happens, like an unexpected emergency room visit or a fall, so everyone knows what to expect.

- The plan could include weekly texts, regular phone calls, monthly online meetings, or a shared online folder to upload documents for reference.
- Use a shared Google Doc or app (like Caring Bridge or Lotsa Helping Hands) to provide updates.
- If issues arise, allow yourself time before responding to a sibling during a disagreement, and when necessary, ask for a third-party recommendation regarding your parent's care to help inform the discussion.
- Your communication should include celebration—try to celebrate small wins and acknowledge each other's efforts whenever possible.

**Tip: Plans change!**

Be open to changing the communication plan based on your parent's needs and your siblings' preferences. Whenever possible, be flexible and practice grace and gratitude and remember, you are all in this together.

EPISODE 4  
**LET'S NOT PLAY FAMILY FEUD**  
How to Maintain Good Relationships with Siblings as Your Parents Age

WITH GUEST:  
KARA GEMMELL  
DIRECTOR  
INDEPENDENT LIVING  
THE NOTTINGHAM



**AGING Well**  
PODCAST



Do you want to hear more tips about how to have good relationships with your siblings as your parents age?

Check out Loretto's Aging Well Podcast, and listen to the “Let's Not Play Family Feud” episode featuring Kara Gemmell, Director of Independent Living at The Nottingham, a Loretto independent living community. Her insight and perspective can help you have positive relationships with your siblings during an emotional time.

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