

5 Tips to Make Your Parents' Home Age-Friendly

From the editors at Caring.com

Talking with your parents about the changes required to make their home age-friendly can be challenging.

Here are five tips to help you navigate these important conversations as smoothly as possible.

1. **Start from a place of love and mutual respect.** A person's home is, by definition, a highly personal place, which makes suggesting changes a sensitive topic right out of the gate. On top of that, age-friendly changes can be particularly challenging because they inherently require acknowledging risk factors and physical limitations that can be difficult to come to terms with -- for your parents and for you. So with this in mind, it's important to start the conversation as truly that -- a conversation -- and allow ample time and emotional space for dialogue and compromise. It is also worthwhile to note that although it can be difficult to decide exactly when is the right time to start making these changes, it is always painfully clear when families have waited too long. There's no time like the present.
2. **Get on the same page.** From the beginning, it's important to make sure that you and your parents understand each other's motivations and concerns. Although you may disagree on specific tactics, try to stay focused on the common goal of maximizing their health, safety, independence, and happiness. You're on the same team. It's important to talk up front about goals and to make sure you're all working off of the same set of assumptions. Make sure you're on the same page about how long your parents would ideally like to live in their current home and about how much money they're able to allocate toward making their home more age-friendly. This context will help you prioritize and focus your resources. It's also important to pace yourselves. Making too many changes at once can be unsettling and even disorienting.
3. **Start with the easy stuff.** There are numerous room-by-room aging-in-place checklists available (see Caring.com's Aging in Place page). These guides will not only help steer your conversation, they also conveniently provide third-party validation of your suggestions.

Alternatively, if you feel the suggestions would be better received from an authority figure outside your family, consider hiring a geriatric care manager to come do an aging-in-place assessment. If you decide it makes sense for your family to take on larger remodeling projects, look for a contractor who is a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS).

To further the feelings of being on the same team, and since falls and injuries can happen at any age, think about what changes you could potentially make to your own home at the same time. Making changes yourself not only shows solidarity, it will also make your home a more accommodating place for your parents to visit. Even if you don't end up modifying your home, really thinking about it will force you to put yourself in your parents' shoes, which will make you more empathetic to their feelings.

4. **Be sensitive to resistance.** If your parents push back, pause and try to understand the root cause of their resistance. Issues such as cost and aesthetics can often be worked around. For example, one of the first suggestions on all the checklists is to remove throw rugs, which are a trip hazard. For some people, this is no problem, but for others it's upsetting and disrupts long-held decorating preferences. If your parents are sentimental about a favorite rug, consider having it mounted on a wall as a tapestry. Alternatively, if they just aren't willing to remove it, you can use double-sided carpet tape to secure the rug to the floor, which will at least minimize the risk.

If your parents' push-back is tied to deeper emotions such as denial, fear, or grief, these issues deserve careful attention and conversation. One thing to remember is that your parents' resistance is actually a good thing in disguise. It means they're fighting to hold onto their independence. A fighting spirit is priceless, especially in later life. Ideally, try to frame your suggestions in a way that respects and taps into your parents' innate desire for independence.

5. **Leverage complementary technology.** There are now a range of new gadgets that help your loved one remain independent at home for longer. Look for monitoring tools, communication tools, ambient sensor products and everyday technology products specifically designed with seniors in mind that complement and enhance the physical changes made to your parents' home. There are many new entrants into this market, giving families more choices when it comes to aging-in-place technology solutions. Companies are coming out with new designs, functionality, and pricing plans to counteract many of the historical barriers to adoption. Have a conversation with your parents to see which features are most important or acceptable to them. If they're more amenable to taking advice from authority figures, speak with their doctor and have him or her bring up the subject. The best system is the one your parents will actually use, so it's wise to involve them in the decision-making process as early as possible.

There's no one right way to discuss these changes with your parents. The style and pace of any conversation will be influenced by your relationship with your parents, their health status, and their openness to the ideas you present. These tips should help



you navigate the waters as you and your parents begin the process of making their home as age-friendly as possible.

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