

Make Time Today #2

A photograph of two women sitting together. The woman in the foreground is wearing glasses and a light blue sweater, smiling warmly. The woman in the background is older, with short grey hair, wearing a beige sweater and holding a blue cup of coffee. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

# THE CARE CONVERSATION



Brits currently pay an average of £2,505.30 a year to look after an elderly relative. That's the price of a week-long family holiday, a piece of high-end tech, or even a decent-sized car. As the number of UK citizens continues to rise, so will the costs of caring for our loved ones. By 2020, we'll be spending more money and time looking out for our elderly family members than our children.

For some, these responsibilities may become so challenging that they impact on their career and family life; many carers miss out on opportunities and precious moments. Our findings have revealed that care duties continue to affect people in various ways, including reduced work hours (16%), shift changes (13%), being forced to leave work unexpectedly (10%), and even suffering mental health issues (12%).

As the demand for professional assistance surges and the pressure rises on makeshift carers, it's more necessary than ever to identify the right solution early on. After realising that your loved one needs more care and attention than you are able to realistically provide, it's time to kick off the care conversation.

Unfortunately, there's a bit more to this than merely opening your mouth. It is a discussion you need to consider deeply.



## What makes the care conversation difficult?

Engaging your elderly loved one in the care conversation, and ensuring healthy reciprocation, requires a careful, considered approach. You need to know the best moment to begin this talk, understand the options available, and ready yourself for every type of possible reaction.

We know that enlisting extra help for a loved one can be a tough decision, but, if your personal life is suffering, you won't be able to provide the high-quality care that they so sorely need. It's time to think about the care conversation so you can change things for the better.

This guide explains in detail how to tackle difficulties when opening a dialogue with a relative needing professional late-stage care. From identifying the importance of discussion to initiating the conversation, we'll cover every type of challenge you're likely to face and explore the ways in which you can overcome these hurdles.



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## When should the care conversation begin?

Before you can sit down with your loved one and start to talk about the prospect of professional health care, you need to confirm that everyone is ready.

It can be tempting to charge in with a sense of determination and bring up the subject out of the blue. However, when it comes to care, one wrong move can make the situation more difficult.

In this section of our guide, we'll take you through the various scenarios that might bring about the need for a care conversation, as well as what you can do to get ready.





## Recognising the signs early on

There is no logic behind starting the care conversation with an elderly relative or friend simply because they're getting older. It's through the acknowledgement of key signs that you can deduce the necessity for professional care.

These are known as trigger points. We explore them in great detail in [the first guide of our series](#). Once a trigger point strikes, it's time to start thinking – and talking – about future solutions.

Identifying these initial symptoms is an important part of preparing for any care conversation. But what are these trigger points and how do you know what to look for?

## Common reasons and circumstances

A trigger point is a moment that makes it clear an elderly person can no longer live independently (or rely solely on you to look after them). Their condition has deteriorated to a point where they require constant, round-the-clock, professional care – support that's available whenever they need it.

Whenever any of these trigger points manifest themselves, it's time to start looking ahead and thinking about how to plan the care conversation.

Problems that appear minor on the face of things – such as back pain, arthritis, or weakened limbs – can lead to accidents later down the line, with far more serious ramifications.

Act fast when you spot a trigger point. It's almost time to talk.

Some examples of trigger points include:

- **A sudden slip, trip or fall that results in physical harm and damaged confidence**
- **The onset of an illness that renders your loved one bedridden**
- **Health complications associated with a weakened physical condition**
- **Mental health issues; even seemingly innocuous matters like forgetfulness can result in medication mix-ups**
- **Difficulty doing simple day-to-day tasks, including getting out of bed, dressing, cooking, cleaning, using the bathroom, shopping, travelling on public transport, and driving.**

## Understanding their options

If you can outline all the options available to your elderly loved one when broaching the topic of health care, the conversation is likelier to go smoothly. People react far more positively when you provide a solution, rather than present a problem. That's why you need to know the range of potential solutions available in your circumstances.

Once you've ascertained the type of trigger point that's in play, and what potential complications might occur because of it, you can seek out the right people to offer support. For example, if your elderly loved one is experiencing difficulties holding items, you may want to consider approaching a health care expert who specialises in arthritis and related conditions.

# How to talk about care

After gaining a good understanding of trigger points and realising the importance of preparation, you need to put things into action. The best way to approach a care conversation is to break the steps down one by one, and there are three areas worth thinking about: getting ready to talk, choosing the right moment, and initiating the dialogue.

By going over the care conversation in advance, you can increase the chances of a beneficial result for both yourself and your elderly loved one. In this section of our guide we explore what to say, when to say it, and how to articulate yourself.

## Getting ready to talk

When planning to sit down with your relative or friend to talk about the move towards health care, you'll need to make sure your message is clear and that all possible points of contention are accounted for.

Firstly, give yourself a window in which to conduct sufficient research. This way, any difficult questions can be answered fully with multiple resources available.

Second, consider who should be part of this conversation when it takes place. Determine who is best equipped to handle this delicate subject matter, and who holds a strong, trusted relationship with your elderly loved one. Remember that having too many people involved can make the talk feel more like an intervention than a discussion, so try to restrict the numbers as much as possible.

And thirdly, you need to think about the elements that may cause this person distress or discomfort. Some of the most popular reasons for hesitancy to enter care include:

- Fear of change
- Embarrassment and frustration at a loss of independence
- Reluctance to move from a place they may have lived for many years
- Disagreement with the person issuing the advice
- Not fully understanding or being able to comprehend the move into care

**Take time to research your loved one's condition, seek professional opinion, carefully consider the people who should be involved in the conversation, and acknowledge the potential pain points before you pick your moment.**



## Choosing the right moment

When it comes to the care conversation, remember the saying: **only fools rush in.**

This is a delicate topic that is all too easy to approach in a clumsy fashion. Going about it the wrong way can unsettle a relative to the point that they become reluctant to discuss the subject again. And, as we have already ascertained, there is no time to waste once a trigger point strikes. That's why it's so important to pick the right moment.

Thorough preparation for the care conversation should be followed by a thoughtful approach. You should also act practically if your loved one isn't in the right frame of mind to have the talk like you initially anticipated.

If things don't feel right (they're in a bad mood, unwell or preoccupied with something else) be ready to reschedule and start planning again.

You should also refrain from reacting strongly in the heat of the moment. The care conversation should be conducted within a calm atmosphere in a gentle manner. This will go a long way to inciting a reasonable response in your loved one – although they may need time to process the information, so give them space if you need to. In terms of location – always choose somewhere familiar and comfortable.

Put yourself in their shoes to help you gain a more profound appreciation of their state of mind. It can help you plan and steer the conversation in a healthy direction that evades conflict.

## Starting the conversation

You'll have a lot to say during the care conversation – from ideas about the future to suggestions on what steps your loved one should take next. As you concentrate on getting your point across in the appropriate tone of voice, be careful not to prevent your loved one from responding.

It's important to remember that the care conversation is a two-way street. They should have as much input as you and feel confident expressing their opinion.

If they raise an issue, don't immediately dismiss it. Consider their problem carefully and weigh up possible solutions.

Indeed, instead of avoiding problems, you should be aiming to shed light on any hesitations or uncertainties your loved one might have, so that you can address them. Ultimately, a collaborative conversation paves the way for you to decide upon a resolution together.

# Overcoming common challenges

Naturally, if the care conversation cannot take place, the issue surrounding support for your elderly loved one becomes more complex.

Effective communication is key to progress, but, in some instances, the relative or friend in question may be unable or unwilling to have the talk.

For certain people, there will be areas of resistance and obstacles to overcome – all of which must be handled sensitively to prevent the dialogue turning into an argument. This section of our guide will explore the challenges you could encounter when sitting down with your loved one for the care conversation.



## Is your relative refusing to talk?

**Be aware:** solutions that appear watertight to you may seem nonsensical to elderly loved ones. It is up to you to calmly and confidently highlight the necessity and benefits of professional care, offering a suitable reply to any protests that may arise.

If your elderly relative or friend has lived in the same property for decades, the mere thought of seeking pastures new can be difficult (if not impossible) to truly comprehend.

The suggestion of entering care can be borderline offensive to those who consider themselves fiercely independent. To them, it's a no-brainer: they're staying put and that's that.

It's understandable, of course, but there's a bigger picture to consider. The longer they are out of care following a trigger point, the more likely they are to hurt themselves or get into difficulties.

This is a serious subject, but you shouldn't put your foot down or make any unreasonable demands during the care conversation. Tell the person that they're loved, and explain that you're not making these decisions to side-line them, but rather to preserve their safety. They might suggest you're being overbearing, but point out the ramifications of the trigger point to demonstrate you are indeed acting in their best interests. The lifestyle changes you're proposing are for the greater good.

Occasionally, an elderly loved one may outright refuse the notion of change, rejecting any alterations you might propose. You may need to dedicate more time to stressing the impact of the trigger points. Appeal to their personality, too. If your loved one appreciates statistics, for example, show them some of the [research conducted by Benenden Health](#). This will paint a picture of the importance of moving into professional care.

## Effective communication

If your elderly loved one is offering up excuses to avoid continuing the care conversation, be sure to treat every reason with the same sense of earnestness. Some of the excuses you may hear include:

- "I don't want to leave the place I've been all my life."
- "The accident was a fluke, I'm perfectly fine and healthy."
- "I can't leave my pet."
- "I'm happy and comfortable here – why should I leave?"
- "Going into care sounds daunting to me."
- "I'll be too far away from you. We'll never see each other."
- "This is too expensive. I don't want to be a burden to you."
- "I don't want to go into care. It's not for me."

Consider every individual point your loved one makes, taking a moment to digest what they say before you react. What you're proposing is a very significant change which will alter their life forever. So be patient and give them the respect they deserve.





## Dealing with difficult questions

Knowledge is your most valuable tool in any care conversation.

If you have done all the necessary research, you'll be able to assuage your loved ones' concerns and have an educated answer for any queries they might have. If you are evidently well-informed on the subject, you may be able to assure your elderly relative or friend that you know what's best for them after all.

### *"How are you going to afford this?"*

When a question like this arises, it's important to alleviate your loved one's fears by gently reminding them that money is not as important to you as their health. If this question is a persistent one, it might be worth bringing up the potential strain that can be placed on your career. Show them the figures we mentioned in the introduction of this guide, and detail how reduced work hours, shift changes and being forced to leave work unexpectedly can be common consequences of your increased care responsibilities.

### *"What will happen to my house?"*

Come at this question from a purely practical point of view. Uncover options for the storing of valued possessions and discuss with all close relatives whether the house can remain within the relationship circle. Although not always possible, knowing that their house will be readily available for them should they wish to visit can go a long way in helping your loved one come to terms with the move.

### *"Aren't you the best person to look after me?"*

Health issues can be quite complex, and the ones suffering from them can downplay their severity. A statement that makes it clear that you are not a healthcare professional, and not adequately equipped to deal with certain situations or perform necessary tests, will go some way to assuring them that specialist health care is the right option.

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Should any questions arise that you can't answer, involve your loved one in the assessment process. A professional consultation will ease any overriding fears and frustrations they may be having, whilst also highlighting the importance of changing their lifestyle and moving towards a care plan.

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## A successful care conversation comes down to recognising the trigger points when they arrive, and approaching your loved one at the right moment after adequate preparation.

This isn't a conversation you can just dive into – you need to assess when is the right time to enter into a dialogue and choose your words carefully.

If your relative or friend is refusing to communicate or discuss the matter further, you'll need to draw on your patience and deftly illustrate the importance of professional care. Ultimately, having access to all the relevant information will play a huge role in influencing the overall success of the conversation.



The ageing population is affecting UK families

[Find out more >](#)

## Thank you for reading our second guide: Make Time Today #2 The Care Conversation

We hope you found the second instalment in our Make Time Today series helpful. [Guide #3](#) focuses on the variety of care options available – outlining the different routes you could venture down to make sure your loved one is in the best possible position for the future.

If you missed any of our other #MakeTimeToday guides, covering a range of care topics, they are available to download here:



#1  
The trigger points for elderly care



#3  
Choosing the best care options and providers





#4  
Paying for care and getting your affairs in order



Our #MakeTimeToday guides have been created alongside our specialist partner [Grace Consulting](#), an independent care advice service that helps people make the best possible care decisions.

If you have any questions about Benenden Health's services or would like to know more about how Benenden Health can support you with caring for an elderly loved one, remember that our supportive teams and their staff are always here to help.

Call us on 0800 414 8205 or send a message via our [online contact form](#) to find out more.

 0800 414 8205  
 [www.benenden.co.uk](http://www.benenden.co.uk)

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