

Ten Principles of Productive Parent Care Conversations

1. Empathy, Empathy, Empathy- Imagine what it would like for you if you were seriously ill, couldn't drive, had a hard time walking, couldn't hear or see well, lost your home of several years. Phrases like: "I know how hard this is for you." "This must be so frustrating." can be very helpful.
2. Ask them what they want in the future. Couch difficult decisions as being in the distant future even if you know they are not.
3. Use third party sources (doctor, lawyer, social worker, DMV to do some of the dirty work.)
4. Avoid direct confrontation if your parent is confused: hide the car keys, dismantle the stove.
5. Don't sweat the small stuff. Let your parent have their opinion even if you believe or know it to be false. Not: "I've told you a hundred times, your mother has been dead twenty years." Respond to the likely emotion behind the comments: "You'd really like to see your parent, wouldn't you?"
6. Offer "either/or" choices: Which assisted living place did you like best-A or B?
7. Come from a caring place when you are in the middle of implementing unwelcome or anxiety-laden changes. "This is so hard for both of us. I really don't want to hurt you. I'm so worried you might get hurt."
8. Don't give orders. Use distractions and rewards to influence behavior.
9. Respond to the emotions you guess your parent is feeling not the content of their words: "It's really hard to think about moving to a new place." "It's so frustrating not to be able to come and go when you want."
10. Try not to take negative comments personally. Know that you are doing the best you can to provide necessary care.

pcconversations 0109

County of Santa Clara Employee Assistance Program

www.scceap.org

(408) 241-7772