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## HAVE YOU HAD THE “MONEY TALK” WITH YOUR PARENTS? EXPERT TIPS ON NAVIGATING FINANCIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH AGING FAMILY



By: Cassidy Horton - March 20, 2025

A Northwestern Mutual survey found that finances are the most avoided topic to discuss with family — above politics (51%), dating (46%) and religion (35%).

“In general, people often shy away from having hard, but important conversations about their finances in fear of feeling uncomfortable or overstepping boundaries,” says Heather Courtney Quinn, wealth management advisor at Fortuna Wealth Management.

But the good news? Having that talk doesn’t have to feel like an ambush. With the right approach, you can turn it into a productive conversation that brings you closer together. Here’s how to talk to aging parents about finances.

### Why the financial talk is so important for aging parents

Many families don’t talk about finances until there’s a crisis. But by then, it’s often too late to make informed decisions.

“The biggest mistake people make is assuming everything is fine,” says Patrick Simasko, elder law attorney and financial advisor at Michigan-based Simasko Law. “They often don’t actually have a clue what their parents have in their bank or how much income they have each month.”

Wondering when to talk about money with aging parents? Here are some red flags that suggest it’s time for the conversation:

- **Unopened mail and late payment notices.** It may be time to consider managing elderly parents’ finances if they’re forgetting to pay bills or open credit card or other statements.
- **Missing money or confusion about expenses.** They may struggle to track spending — or, worse, fall victim to fraud or financial abuse.
- **Increased interest in unusual investments, sweepstakes or get-rich-quick schemes.** Scammers target older adults with promises of easy money.

- **Memory lapses or difficulty keeping up with financial tasks.** Forgetfulness can signal a deeper issue that requires intervention.

If you’re noticing these signs, starting the conversation sooner rather than later can help prevent serious financial problems.

### How to prepare for the financial talk: 2 important steps

A productive conversation starts long before you sit down with your parents. Taking these steps ahead of time can set you up for success.

#### 1. Set clear goals

Before the discussion, ask yourself:

- **What do I want to accomplish?** Is it making sure bills are paid? Discussing long-term care? Checking if they have an estate plan?
- **What’s the top priority?** You don’t need to cover everything in one sitting. Remember that this isn’t a one-time talk — it’s an ongoing conversation.
- **How much do I know about their key financial situation?** Do they have a will and power of attorney? How about life insurance? Where are their important documents and account numbers stored?

#### 2. Decide who should be involved

If you have siblings or other close family, decide whether they should be part of the conversation.

But be mindful of family dynamics: If tensions run high between siblings or adult children, consider appointing a neutral third party — like a financial advisor or elder law attorney — to help facilitate the conversation.

### How to start the conversation

Discussing finances can make parents feel vulnerable. The way you frame the conversation can make all the difference. Here’s how to talk to aging parents about their future.

#### Pick the right time and place

A relaxed family visit is better than a high-pressure or emotionally charged situation.

“These conversations need to come from a place of love and respect,” says Cameron Huddleston, author of *Mom and Dad, We Need to Talk*. “If you let your parents know that you want to talk to them because you’re looking out for their best interests, they likely won’t get upset with you.”

### Start with empathy, not control

A common mistake is coming in too aggressively, which can make parents shut down. Huddleston suggests saying something like:

“Mom and Dad, you took good care of me while I was growing up. I want to be able to do the same if you ever need help from me. Yes, I understand that your finances might not be any of my business right now. But if something were to happen to you, it might become my business. That’s why I’d like to get some information from you.”

### Ask open-ended questions

The best way to keep the conversation going is to ask thoughtful, open-ended questions.

Some great questions to start with:

- “If you were in the hospital, how would I make sure your bills got paid?”
- “Do you have a plan for long-term care if you ever need it?”
- “Would you feel comfortable sharing where important documents are stored in case I ever needed to access them?”

If they’re hesitant, don’t push. The goal is to build trust, not force them into a conversation they’re not ready for.

### Key topics you’ll want to talk about

Once the conversation is rolling, focus on the most important financial matters as your parents age.

#### 1. Daily money management

How do they pay bills? Are they taking any debts into retirement? Do they receive scam calls, texts or emails?

“I regularly talk with my mother about scams I’ve heard of and listen when she talks about spam texts or emails,” says Brian Seelinger, an attorney at Knox, McLaughlin, Gornall & Sennett, P.C. “This communication helps remind her to ask me if she’s not positive about some type of mail, email or text.”

#### 2. Healthcare costs and insurance

Medical expenses and other care costs can quickly drain savings in retirement, so ask your parents about their health insurance, including Medicare, supplemental insurance policies and long-term care insurance. If they don’t have a plan for covering unexpected medical expenses, now is the time to discuss options.

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Many aging parents assume they won't need long-term care, but 70% of people over 65 eventually do. Planning ahead of time can make care more affordable and less stressful.

"I just had a 73-year-old woman with muscular dystrophy come in and tell me she cannot afford \$60 a week for physical therapy," says Simasko, elder law attorney and financial advisor. "If her family had gotten involved sooner, she may not have had any issues covering her copay costs."

### 3. Estate planning and wills

Make sure your parents have:

- An **up-to-date will** — legal document stating you want property and other assets distributed after your death
- A **power of attorney** — legal document authorizing a person to make financial and medical decisions on your behalf
- A **living will or advance healthcare directive** — legal document outlining your medical preferences and appointing another person to make care decisions on your behalf, especially for end-of-life care

"The two most important documents families should have in place before an emergency arises are medical power of attorney and financial power of attorney," says Patrick Simasko, elder law attorney and financial advisor.

If your parents don't have these documents yet, encourage them to meet with an estate planning attorney. It's far easier to get things in order while they're healthy than to deal with legal red tape during a crisis.

### 4. Future housing plans

Many parents assume they'll stay in their homes forever, but aging can bring mobility challenges or health issues that make independent living difficult, affecting their well-being.

Ask such questions as:

- Do you have a plan if you need home care or assisted living?
- Are you open to help from a caregiver, such as a support worker?
- How do you feel about downsizing or moving to a senior community?

### What to do when the conversation becomes difficult

Talking about money can bring up a lot of emotions — pride, fear or even embarrassment. If your parents become defensive, try these approaches.

### Acknowledge their concerns

If they say, "I don't need help. Everything is fine," try responding with:

"I trust that you've got things under control, but I just want to make sure I can step in if there's ever an emergency. This is about making things easier for you — not taking anything away."

### Use real-life examples

If they're reluctant to talk, sharing a real-world story can help:

"I know someone whose parents didn't have a will, and it created a lot of stress for their family. I'd love to make sure we don't end up in a similar situation."

### Bring in a trusted third party

If emotions run high, ask if you can bring in a financial advisor, attorney or family friend they trust:

"Would you feel more comfortable talking to a financial advisor together? They can walk us through what's important without any pressure."

### How to create a financial care plan together

Once you've started the conversation, create a simple plan to keep up with your aging parents' financial health.

- **Set up bill payment reminders.** A calendar,

email alerts or a shared system can prevent missed payments. It could help to talk about the pros and cons of a joint bank account.

- **Monitor accounts for unusual activity.** Many banks allow you to establish a trusted contact person to receive alerts.
- **Plan regular check-ins.** Even a simple, "Anything on your mind financially?" can be a good way to keep dialogue open.

"A big mistake when speaking to aging parents is attempting to change a significant portion of their financial lives all at once," says Peter Hoglund, senior vice president at Wealth Enhancement Group.

"Most of those financial habits are built over many years and provide comfort in familiarity. Try to identify and suggest changes to only those financial items that are truly harmful, and not simply different or archaic," says Hoglund.

### Resources and financial support for families

Need extra support? These trusted resources can help you figure out how to talk to aging parents about finances and support you with services:

- **Government programs.** The National Council on Aging offers financial assistance programs, and each state has an agency for the aging to help seniors stay independent in their own homes.
- **Elder law specialists.** The American Bar Association's Elder Law section can help you find an attorney who specializes in estate planning, power of attorney and elder financial protection.
- **Fraud prevention.** If you suspect financial abuse or a scam, report it to the National Elder Fraud Hotline or your state's adult protective services.
- **2-1-1 hotline.** This FCC-supported hotline is your three digits for information and social services that can help with food, finances, transportation and other necessary support through more than 200 local organizations, including United Way, Goodwill and community action partnerships. Simply dial 2-1-1 for help or search for help by ZIP code.

Patrick Simasko, principal of Simasko Law, has dedicated his legal career to the practice of elder law. Over the past 20 years, he has helped hundreds of families plan for their futures, protect their assets and receive the financial and medical benefits available to them.

For more information, please call 586-468-6793 or visit [www.simaskolaw.com](http://www.simaskolaw.com).

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