

Communicating with Aging Parents

The holiday meal is planned. Candles come down off the shelves. Presents are wrapped and cards addressed. We look forward to reconnecting with family, and often that includes elderly parents, aunts, uncles, and friends.

In our work with seniors and their families, we at Eddy & Schein Group have seen many warm and easy relationships between older and younger family members. But sometimes, it seems that the two generations have little to talk about, resulting in long, uncomfortable silences when they meet. When they have nothing in common or if there is a difficult subject to confront, like finances or in-home care, conflicts can arise. Then we hear, "I just can't talk to my parents anymore."

If these situations are approached with sensitivity and consideration, the two generations can bridge the gap and find a great deal of pleasure in visits.

How to Avoid Sitting in Silence

You've been looking forward to a visit and now you're sitting together and seem to have nothing to say. Avoid this with a little advance planning. Before coming to visit, think what you would like to talk about. Perhaps you could bring something that might hold some interest for both of you, like recipes that you recently tried, travel magazines, or pictures of the grandchildren. You could ask to look at some old photo albums as these visual cues can open the door to some wonderful conversations and mutual sharing.

Sometimes the best visits are short ones. Rather than sit in silence for a couple of hours wondering what to say, shorten the visit so that it ends after you have finished talking about everything for the moment. You can always come back later.

Timing is Everything

Younger people sometimes have trouble slowing down and being fully present when talking to a senior. It is far better to limit your time and truly connect and share while you are together.

Sometimes elderly people communicate indirectly, or seem to drift off when there's a subject they don't want to discuss. On a topic about which you've already made up your mind, try to listen and consider what is being said as they probably have valid points to share. Most importantly, don't discuss important matters when you're rushed.

How to Avoid Conflict

There are some subjects that are difficult to approach, and none so challenging as suggesting that an older person, who has enjoyed a great deal of independence, may need help managing financial, legal, or health insurance matters. This conversation can become explosive if not handled carefully.

One of the best ways to encourage older adults to accept help is to position it as a strategy for living at home longer and remaining independent.

Look at the situation from their perspective – they probably understand their years of independence are numbered, but want to maintain their dignity for as long as they can. The checkbook can often be synonymous with independence and they can be appalled that you want to take that over. If they are too proud to allow you to take over bill paying, perhaps they would agree to see an accountant or a Daily Money Manager instead.

As an intermediary step, try offering to help sort mail. You can suggest sitting with them while they do their bill paying to learn their system and help write the checks so they can sign them.

However, if the senior is adamant that they don't want help and, at this point, the only danger is a few bounced checks, you may have to back off for the time being. Nonetheless, it is important to keep an eye on the situation.

NEVER Talk Baby Talk

One of the biggest mistakes when communicating with seniors is not treating them like adults. Choose your words and tone of voice carefully, and avoid the following:

- Using a singsong voice, changing pitch and tone, exaggerating words
- Needlessly simplifying the length and complexity of sentences
- Speaking more slowly than usual
- Using limited vocabulary
- Repeating or paraphrasing what has just been said
- Using terms like "honey" or "dear"
- Using statements that sound like questions

Remember that your senior is an adult who must be treated with respect. Often, they are dealing with the loss of a spouse, a friend, or their independence. Remember, past lives and current feelings of loss can affect the conversation. Hearing loss can also be a factor, and if hearing aids are not an option, consider a transmitter and headphones.

Eddy & Schein Group can help you with executor responsibilities.

If you, or someone you know, could benefit from having a Personal Finance Manager, please contact Eddy & Schein Group for a **free phone consultation**.

Visit our [website](#) or call us: **New York 212-987-1427** or **California 917-881-7042**