

5 Tips to Get a Person to Consider Making Major Life Changes

Adapted from an article by Valerie Feurich on www.TeepaSnow.com

Have you ever tried to convince someone you care about to make a major life change, and were met with rejection? Do you have a loved one experiencing the symptoms of Huntington's disease who is no longer safe in their own home, but refuses to receive in-home help or move into a long-term care home?

These types of conversations can be tough and strain relationships. What can you do?



Here are 5 tips to keep in mind as you prepare to have this type of conversation:

1. The relationship always comes first.

Know your agenda, don't show your agenda.

Why? Because your relationship should always come first. If you rush ahead and try to force your will onto someone else, chances are you'll reap resistance and mistrust. Don't risk harming your relationship and complicating things further down the road.

While care partners mean well with phrases like *Mom, we have decided that it isn't safe for you to live here anymore*, try to put yourself in the

other person's shoes. How would you feel if someone tried to abruptly tell you how to live your life? What would you think if someone told you you'd have to leave your home? Chances are, you wouldn't like it.



As you talk to the person you're concerned about, try to be an equal partner. Remember that you are talking to an adult and treat them as such. We understand you are concerned about the person, and your stress level may be running high as you're truly worried they'll get hurt.

However, this anxiousness may cause you to rush into the conversation, exposing your agenda far too early.

To have a chance at a productive conversation, you'll need to be truly connected to the person first. As you're chatting with them about other things, find one positive moment at a time, to build comfort and trust. Once you feel you two are genuinely connected, you may try to guide the conversation toward the topic that is on your mind.



2. Use an *I Share, You Share* Positive Action Starters



An *I Share, You Share* Positive Action Starter can help you gently guide the conversation. **Start by sharing something about yourself, and then ask how they see that same topic for themselves.**

As an example, you might say something like *A lot of our relatives with HD thought they would be safer in a long-term care environment when they couldn't toilet and bathe themselves.* And then you ask them to share: *For you, do you have a specific milestone?* This way you're not saying anything directly about them moving or giving them instructions on what you think they should do. Instead, you're opening the door to a conversation on the matter and giving them the space to express their thoughts around it.

Give your loved one plenty of time to process and respond. The extra time allows both of you to have a fuller understanding of each other.

3. Reflect what they are telling you

As you listen to the person, occasionally repeat back a few of the last words that they've just said.

So, if your person were to say *this place is my home, I have all of my things here*, you may want to respond with *yeah, all of your things are here*, and then pause. Or if the person were to say *I'm not ready to move away from my family*, you could respond with *yeah, you're not ready to move.*



How does that help? When you reflect back their words and pause, you're effectively inviting them to tell you more. And by them telling you more, you get the chance to learn about their objections to the move, which may allow you to brainstorm solutions to overcome them.

Additionally, by reflecting the other person's words, you signal to them that you hear what they are saying. Not only does that support a person living with HD in a conversation, but it is also comforting to know that the other party is truly listening.

Now, we know what you may be thinking: Doesn't that make the conversation a little awkward? Most likely, the other person will not notice that you're repeating or rephrasing their last few words. But as with all things in life, we get more comfortable with a new technique the more we use it, which brings us to the next point:

4. Practice the conversation in advance



How well do you want this conversation to go? Would you go into a potentially life-changing test without practicing? Most likely, you'd spend some time preparing to increase your chances for success.

See if you can find a family member or friend to practice this conversation. You may even want to record yourself. Watch the video to see whether you detect signs of impatience or stress in your voice or body language. Remember how important it is to allow plenty of time for a response so you're loved one can process what you're saying and express their feelings.

Practice this conversation and the various ways it could go. Practice speaking slowly and taking long pauses. Practice, reflecting their last words, as well as the *I Share, You Share* Positive Actions Starters we discussed in tip #2. See where you get stuck or what goes well and get comfortable with a variety of possible scenarios. That way you're less likely to be caught off-guard and increase your chances of resolving this matter in the most respectful, collaborative way possible.

5. If things go sideways, back away

Remember tip #1? Your relationship comes first.

In this situation, that means that if you sense the conversation has taken a wrong turn or you can tell the person is starting to get suspicious of your intentions, back off and let it go for the time being.

The same concept applies if you cannot build a deeper connection on that day. Ask yourself: What is going to take longer? Getting connected before you approach a topic, or being impatient, rushing into your agenda, and fighting instead? If you sense a bit of distance, leave the agenda at the door. Try again another time when you're sensing a genuine connection.



Conclusion

Seeing the independent person you once knew become less and less safe in their surroundings can be tough. And trying to convince someone to accept help or move when they're not ready can create stress for all parties involved.



While there is no silver bullet for this type of situation, by making sure you treat the person as an equal partner, you decrease the risk of harming your relationship. By speaking slowly, listening patiently, reflecting their last words and preparing for this conversation in advance, you increase your chances of getting to a place where it truly is two adults helping each other through a tough transition.

Want more tips?

Contact HD Reach to work with a Social Worker to problem solve any issues you're having. Email: info@hdreach.org. Call: 919.803.8128. Find information at www.HDReach.org