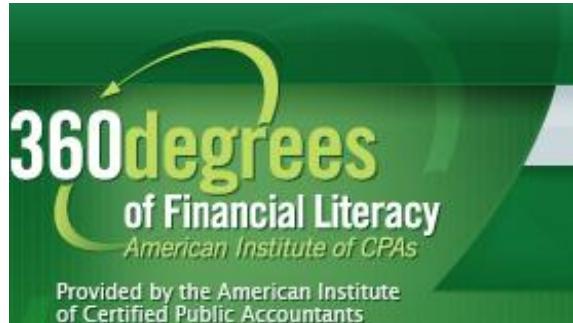


How do I talk to my elderly parents about their finances? (what our children may wish to discuss)

Talking to your parents about money is always difficult, especially when the money you're talking about is theirs. They belong to a generation that was taught to keep their information private and not to share their concerns openly. Even if they need help, they may be unwilling to talk to you because it's "none of your business," or because they're afraid to give up control over their own financial affairs.

If they're reluctant to talk to you, make it clear that you respect their needs and concerns. However, don't be afraid to express your own needs and concerns as well. Their financial situation may impact you also, particularly if they become unable to support or care for themselves. At the very least, you should find out where they keep their personal records; discuss housing, health care, and budgeting issues; and find out what steps they have taken to plan their estate.

What if they still refuse to talk to you? If they're capable of managing their affairs for now, you may want to drop the matter and reapproach them later. Or you may suggest that they talk to another family member, a trusted friend, or a professional advisor, such as an attorney or financial planner.



Important Questions to Ask Aging Parents (information we can provide to our loved ones)

Remember "the talk" your parents initiated (maybe) with you many years ago? Well, now it's your turn to sit on the opposite side of the table. If you're the adult child of aging parents, it's important to open up a conversation about their future needs and wishes. The best time to do so is when your parents are relatively healthy and active. Otherwise, you may find yourself making critical decisions on their behalf in the midst of a crisis--without a road map.

The reality, though, is that many adult children would rather avoid such a discussion, because it can create feelings of fear and loss on both sides, and adult children want to avoid getting too personal by asking about financial or other matters. Here are some questions in the areas of finances, health, living situation, and memorial wishes that can help you start a conversation.

Finances

Ask

- What institutions hold your assets? Ask your parents to create a list of their bank, brokerage, and retirement accounts, including account numbers and online user names and passwords, if applicable. You should also know where to find their insurance policies (life, home, auto, disability, long-term care),

Social Security cards, titles to their house and vehicles, outstanding loan documents, and past tax returns. If your parents have a safe-deposit box or home safe, make sure you can access the key or combination.

- Do you currently work with any financial, legal, or tax advisors? If so, get a list of names with contact information.
- How often do you meet with your financial advisor? Do you think it would be helpful to do so soon? Would you like me to come?
- Do you need help paying monthly bills or reviewing items like credit card statements, medical receipts, or property tax bills?
- Do you have a durable power of attorney? A durable power of attorney is a legal document that allows a named individual (such as an adult child) to manage all aspects of a parent's financial life if he or she becomes disabled or incompetent.
- Do you have a will? If so, find out where it's located and who is named as executor. If it's more than five years old, your parents may want to review it to make sure their current wishes are represented. Ask if they have any specific personal property disposition requests that they want to discuss now (e.g., Aunt Agnes should get the china set).
- Are your beneficiary designations up-to-date? Designated beneficiaries on insurance policies, pensions, IRAs, and investments trump any instructions in your parents' wills.
- Do you have an overall estate plan? A trust? A living trust can help manage an estate while your parents are still living.
-