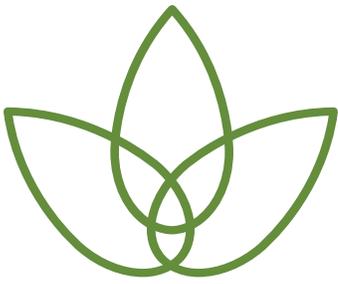


TACKLING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

How to Navigate 5 Steps
in a Senior Living Move



HOLIDAY
RETIREMENT



Perhaps you noticed dad moved a little slower during your last holiday visit, or maybe you just wanted to check in with your parent to make sure everyone was doing well. Whether you live down the street or across the country from your aging parent, sometimes initiating a discussion around aging is the most difficult step in a series of paramount tough conversations.

A significant element in this series of discussions is your parent's current and future living situation. Today, there are myriad senior living options available and no single, right choice for every senior. There is, however, a key spectrum of time in which to think and talk about this topic: before a crisis.

Dorian Mintzer, MSW, PhD, is a licensed psychologist, career/life transition coach, and co-author of *The Couples Retirement Puzzle: Conversations for Creating an Amazing New Life Together*. She explains how all too often families wait until it is too late to talk about second half of life transitions, "if we're so lucky, we'll have the assurance, freedom, and time to make our own life decisions. When families wait too long to have these discussions, a crisis situation can drastically minimize the senior living options available to someone."

As Dr. Mintzer explains, it is essential for adult children to have this conversation with a parent even if he or she is healthy.

"In fact, a parent might best continue to live at his or her current stage of vitality longer by switching their living situation before there is a crisis."

— DR. DORIAN MINTZER

"By the age of 65, how we age is made up of 70 percent attitude, lifestyle, exercise of body and brain, and spirituality, and only 30 percent genetics. In other words, as we age, 70 percent of our quality of life is made up of things we can control, and one's living situation is part of what we can control."

— DR. DORIAN MINTZER



IN THIS E-BOOK

Dr. Mintzer guides adult children through the tough conversations at each of the five stages of a senior living move. Whether you are hoping to have this conversation with one parent or both parents; whether you live locally or far from each other; and regardless of the family dynamic – an only child or large family – this e-book aims to promote proactive conversations to help adult children and parents best prepare for collaborative transitions.

“All transitions have endings, unknowns, and new beginnings.”

– DR. DORIAN MINTZER

Prior to initiating the first of many conversations about aging with a parent, it is important to understand change in general. Take the time to think through how you feel about the future transitions your parent faces and how he or she might feel. Then, think about the major changes you have faced in your own life and how you felt before, during, and after them. Were you nervous or anxious? What and who helped you through that process? By understanding how tremendous and stressful major life transitions can be, adult children can best show empathy and understanding when initiating these conversations.

LEARN FROM THE PAST

For some adult children and their parents, talking about other difficult topics related to aging and health has gone smoothly in the past. For others, uncomfortable discussions are often avoided. Adult children should think about past conversations. Who initiated the discussions? How did the parent respond to uncomfortable questions? Anticipating how a parent will react and respond to the conversation will help you best prepare.

ASK BEFORE YOU ASSUME

Dr. Mintzer explains that change is transition and every transition is made up of endings, unknowns, and new beginnings. Endings mean letting go, loss, and change; unknowns are often made up of leaps of faith; and new beginnings are filled with adjustment. Instead of assuming how your parent feels about change, ask him or her about transitions in general. You might be surprised by his or her answers.

SET A TIME AND PLACE

In an effort to avoid a rushed conversation or catching your parent off guard, let him or her know ahead of time you want to discuss an important subject. With a heads up, your parent will feel more comfortable and have a sense of control. Plan to meet at a safe place, where you know your parent will be comfortable. For some, this might be at your parent’s home, a favorite café, or meeting in a quiet park for a walk. Wherever you choose to meet, make sure you set aside enough time to talk so you do not have to cut the conversation short.

TOUGH CONVERSATIONS: QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU ASSUME.

Dr. Mintzer recommends asking these questions to help normalize the topic and to work as a natural segue to the next conversation. Conclude this exercise by recognizing all change is difficult, but also exciting.



When we moved overseas/across the country, how was that for you?



How did you feel when dad retired?



What was the transition like when you went back to school?



How did you feel when you became an empty nester?

“Life is a series of transitions. Some are clearer than others. The second half of life is filled with more of these unclear transitions, especially as we all continue to live longer.”

– DR. DORIAN MINTZER

When introducing the topic of senior living to a parent for the first time, it is important to remember all of the different options available and not assume your preference will also be your parent's first choice. For example, if an adult child lives far away from his or her parent, the adult child might think the parent should relocate to a senior living community near his or her home. However, a parent may not want to leave his or her friends or the community. Remember to keep the spectrum of options in mind, and aim to understand how your parent feels about each one.

SET THE STAGE

Remember, life transitions can be stressful and emotional, especially when that transition is moving. In fact, a major change in living condition (new home, remodeling, deterioration of neighborhood or home, etc.) ranks 28 out of the 43 most stressful life events on The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory.¹ When talking about changing living situations, a parent could also be thinking about losing memories and letting go of comfort zones. Find out which part of the transition appears most difficult for your parent, that way you can be especially sensitive as you both begin this process. While noting this transition is associated with many losses for your parent, also remind him or her there are numerous potential gains to focus on when considering a senior living move.

Ask your parent, "What is the hardest part of this for you: the ending, the unknown, or the new beginning?"

LET GO OF EXPECTATIONS

Dr. Mintzer encourages adult children to remember they have already achieved an important goal for this conversation: they initiated it. It is critical in the first discussion to introduce the topic of senior living free of agendas and expectations. Do not expect to have a plan or make a decision by the time the conversation ends. Simply be an active participant and listen to how your parent feels and thinks. And remember, there is no sole, correct path when it comes to senior living. It is up to you and your parent to find the option that best works for him or her and the unique situation.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

As Dr. Mintzer explains, despite their best attempts, "you" statements can come across as shaming and accusatory, and can instantly put your parent on the defensive. Instead, she recommends employing the basic philosophy of "I" statements to voice your concerns.



TURN "YOU" STATEMENTS INTO "I" STATEMENTS

You can't keep up with the housework



I've been thinking about how big the house is for you now.

You don't get around as easily as you used to.



I worry about your safety.

You shouldn't be driving anymore.



I'm concerned about you driving at night.

Your health is deteriorating



I worry what might happen if you have an emergency and you're home alone.

LISTEN WITHOUT INTERRUPTING

When discussing the topic of senior living options and aging, ask your parent open-ended questions as much as possible. And, most importantly, be patient with his or her responses. Be an active listener, but avoid interrupting your parent. If your parent is not actively engaged in the conversation when it first begins, do not be afraid to press for more information by asking him or her to elaborate. For example, “tell me more about that.” Or, “what do you mean by this?”

TAKE BREAKS

Discussing the transition to senior living can be an emotional and challenging conversation for both adult children and parents. Consider taking breaks for both parties to digest information and clear heads before returning to the discussion. By pausing to go for a walk together, make dinner, or play a game, the transition dialogue can feel more natural.

CHECKLIST OF TOPICS TO TALK THROUGH WHEN DISCUSSING SENIOR LIVING OPTIONS



FINANCES.

What is realistic? What is affordable?



LOCATION.

Does your parent want to stay in his or her current community? Does he or she want to move closer to family?



TYPE OF SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY.

What amenities and services does your parent want in a senior living community?



TIMELINE.

Ideally, when does your parent want to make the move to a senior living community?

“Even if you don’t agree with your parent, listen and appreciate what he or she is saying.”

— DR. DORIAN MINTZER

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR A MORE PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION.



We had a lot of snow last winter; how was that for you?



What are the easy parts about keeping up with the house?



How safe do you feel driving at night?



What do you like/don’t like about living here?



How do you feel when you’re alone at night?



What do you worry about in this house?



What would your ideal living situation be like in 5, 10, 15 years?



What are your friends thinking or doing about their living options?

For additional cost of living considerations to discuss with your parent, visit [holidaytouch.com/senior-living](https://www.holidaytouch.com/senior-living).

GET CREATIVE

Sometimes a parent's perception may not align with reality, or he or she might be resistant to the overall discussion. Perhaps a parent insists he or she is too healthy or too young to move out of his or her current home. If this is the case, consider the conversation in a more creative way with these ideas.



1. GIVE EXAMPLES: If applicable, give your parent specific examples of why you are concerned about his or her current living situation. Maybe he or she frequently has expired food in the fridge or he or she is not able to access the second floor of the home due to physical limitations. Giving examples can help your parent better understand where you are coming from with your concerns.



2. SEEK EXPERTISE: If your parent dismisses conversations to consider senior living options or discuss any decline in health or cognitive abilities, consider enlisting the perspective of others—a doctor, neighbor, or friend. Sometimes gathering an objective individual's perspective can help a parent better understand the concerns an adult child may have about his or her current living situation.



3. MAKE IT A GAME: If you are having trouble getting your parent to open up or to realistically relate to their daily realities, try implementing “The Cards I’ve Been Dealt.” This is a card game created to draw attention to how life transitions impact lives by providing a tool for discovering the nuances of daily living that need to be supported.²

The game, which aims to shape the dialogue between you and your parent, helps extract what is most unique about a person and respect the individual's preferences and rhythms, validating his or her emotions, and restoring his or her self-esteem. By incorporating the conversation into a game, it might allow your parent to feel less “on the spot” and help him or her open up about daily realities. To learn more or purchase “The Cards I’ve Been Dealt,” visit thecardsivebeendealt.com.

“Tell your parent, ‘I’m so happy to hear how well you think you’re doing, but it would make me feel better if I could talk to your doctor—or a neighbor—to make sure they don’t have any concerns.’”

— DR. DORIAN MINTZER

When the initial conversations result in a parent's decision to consider researching senior living options, there are a variety of ways adult children can help their parent through the selection and touring process. By lending support and setting up community tours, you can help your parent navigate the emotions and thoughts that emerge when researching a new residence.

AIM FOR VARIETY

Even though you and your parent may have landed on a preferred senior living option or community in your discussions, it is important that you both consider the variety of choices available and not make a decision after touring just one community. This exercise can validate the initial decision, and at other times, it can open up you or your parent to another – potentially superior – option.

PAINT THE PICTURE

Without his or her belongings, friends, or a support system, your parent may have trouble picturing themselves in a senior living community while partaking in the touring process. Help them visualize how they can continue to enjoy activities and hobbies in a new venue whenever possible.

OBSERVE AND PARTICIPATE

Throughout the touring process, encourage your parent to both observe a potential new residence and participate in the retirement community. Maybe on the first visit, your parent could sit in on some of the offered events and activities; and on the second visit, he or she could participate in one of them. This might help your parent ease into the idea of living in a senior living community. If you are interested in learning more about the events and activities offered, ask a retirement community team member for a full calendar you can share with your parent after the tour.

PLANNING MAKES PERFECT

The more your parent can see him or herself in a senior living community before the move, the more at ease he or she will be with the decision. Before touring or visiting a community, call ahead to coordinate a lunch table with residents so your parent can enjoy getting to know them and hearing firsthand about daily life at the community. Tell the community a little bit about your parent so he or she can sit with residents of similar ages, interests, or backgrounds. This will help your parent connect with residents and feel what it is like to call the senior living community home.

HELP YOUR PARENT VISUALIZE LIFE IN A SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY:



“What a beautiful library. Mom, I could see you reading your books over by the bay window.”



“Look dad, this class is practicing Tai Chi, something you’ve always wanted to try.”



“I could see the whole family enjoying Sunday dinner with you at that table.”

If your parent waits to downsize or discuss plans for his or her possessions, family members can be left guessing about his or her wishes, which can often happen during a crisis situation. While the idea of downsizing can seem daunting for some, when your parent has the freedom to select the possessions to keep, donate to charity, and give to loved ones, it is far superior than the alternative. In fact, there are a number of downsizing options to make the whole process fun and therapeutic.

LET THEM BE IN CONTROL

While you may need to help your parent stay on task, it is crucial he or she also feel in control. Be mindful of your tone and language when helping your parent downsize by sorting through possessions. For example, instead of telling your parent he or she needs to get rid of a pile of things, ask which item from a pile he or she would like to keep.

BE EMPATHETIC

Downsizing can be an emotional process. At times, your parent may become angry at the situation, and by extension, at you. Remember what a huge transition downsizing is and be empathetic. Let your parent know you understand how overwhelming or nostalgic this process is, and exercise patience and empathy.

BRING IN A PROFESSIONAL

If circumstances allow, consider hiring a professional decorator or organizer to help in the downsizing process. An objective, professional opinion can give the necessary input without emotional ties or a fear of hurting someone's feelings. If your parent's five-bedroom house is filled to the brim, it might be best to have a professional spearhead the process of sorting through belongings. Similarly, a professional decorator can help with the final step of transitioning to a senior living community. In addition to measuring the new home and existing furniture to see how items will fit, a designer can help your parent feel in control by asking for input and reviewing designs and furniture layouts.

THREE CREATIVE IDEAS

If you are feeling creative about downsizing, consider these ideas from Dr. Mintzer for helping your parent downsize.



CREATE A LEGACY BOOK

Help your parent make a legacy book by taking pictures of prized belongings (even the ones he or she is bringing to a new home) and compiling them into a book. Include how your parent describes each item (e.g., it has been in the family for decades) along with his or her favorite memories (e.g., it was from their first trip to China).



KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY

Downsizing is the perfect opportunity to give sentimental items to loved ones. By gifting special pieces to family members and friends, your parent can appreciate the joy an item gives to others. Instead of wondering where an item is, your parent can feel good knowing a loved one has it in safekeeping.



GIVE

For superfluous items that do not hold as much sentimental value to your parent, consider donating them to a charity. While charity drives are great options, there are other more personalized avenues to consider. For example, a program through your parent's church for household donations, or perhaps sponsoring a family with gifts during the holiday season.

The final step of change is also the first step of another journey: a new beginning. While some seniors thrive on new routines and changes in scenery, others have a harder time letting go of their beloved comfort zones. Throughout your parent's transition to a senior living community, remember, just like the steps discussed in this e-book, helping him or her thrive in a senior living community is a process.



ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

Everyone adjusts to transition in his or her own way. While your parent's timeline may be slower or faster than others, continue to encourage your parent to participate in the retirement community to ease the transition. Whether he or she joins a class on something that is already a favorite pastime, or picks up a new hobby, make sure to follow up for additional details. Ask your parent about the class, if he or she has seen any live entertainment at the community, or if he or she has made any new friends. When sharing this journey with you, your parent will look forward to providing you updates on events and activities.

Keep in mind that well-being is a combination of connection, engagement, purpose, and meaning. Support your parent so he or she finds ways to feel good about his or her choices.



NEVER STOP TALKING

Once your parent has physically moved to a new home, continue the transition discussion and encourage open communication. Check in with them regularly to know how they are feeling, understand any shifts in perception, and ensure your parent and fellow family members are on the same page.



GIVE THEM TIME

Immediately following a move, you might feel a need to visit your parent in his or her new home more than you normally would; however, make sure you give your parent enough time and space to adjust to the senior living community and new routines. Your parent will likely have a new schedule, which could be busier than before because of the activities and amenities offered at the community. When you do visit, make sure you clear it with him or her in advance so you both can find a time that does not conflict with activities or social engagements.



WHERE TO BEGIN

If you are concerned about an aging parent or loved one, approaching the tough conversations associated with senior living options should not be delayed. But when you are diligent and thoughtful in tackling tough conversations, discussions about retirement living can be that much more enjoyable for both you and your parent, and can actually bring you closer together.

For more information about a senior living community near you or a loved one, visit [holidaytouch.com/about-us/contact-us](https://www.holidaytouch.com/about-us/contact-us).

ABOUT
**DORIAN MINTZER,
MSW, PHD**



DORIAN MINTZER, M.S.W., PHD, board certified coach, has more than 40 years of clinical experience. As a therapist, coach, consultant, speaker, writer, and teacher, she brings her expertise in adult development and positive psychology, combined with her personal and clinical experiences, to help individuals and couples navigate the second half of life. She facilitates the “4th Tuesday Revolutionize your Retirement Interview with Experts Series.” She is co-author of *The Couple’s Retirement Puzzle: 10 Must-Have Conversations for Creating an Amazing New Life Together* and is one of the co-authors of *Live Smart after 50*. She is a co-producer of *The Career Playbook: Second Half Plays* e-book and a contributor to a number of books including: *Not your Mother’s Retirement*, *65 Things to do When you Retire* (and its sequel on Travel), *70 Things to do When you Turn 70* and *The Six Secrets to a Happy Retirement*. Dr. Mintzer has been featured in a variety of national and local publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, NPR, ABC Evening News, and The TODAY Show.

Learn more about Dr. Mintzer at www.revolutionizeretirement.com.

ABOUT
HOLIDAY RETIREMENT



HOLIDAY RETIREMENT, a trusted name in senior living, provides security, comfort, and value to seniors and their loved ones. Seniors thrive in our affordable independent senior living communities, which offer all the amenities of their own house without the hassle and maintenance of a single-family home.

Learn more about Holiday Retirement at holidaytouch.com.

SOURCES:

¹ <http://www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory>

² <http://www.thecardsivebeendealt.com>

