

φιλότιμο • A GUIDE TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

How to Talk to Parents About Care

THE 40/70 RULE

Presented at Belmont Village Senior Living, Oak Park

Thomaie Hilaris • Assisting Hands Home Care of Melrose Park • September 19, 2026

TODAY'S STORY

Story Time

Yiayia and the family moment that brought me here

We all become caregivers, sooner or later.



My Path Here

1

French Teacher

Where I started — the gift: how people learn, and radical acceptance of who they are.

2

Leadership & Family Business

Master's in Organizational Leadership; family manufacturing business; school administration.

3

Finding This Field

No one escapes caregiving — we all become caregivers. My Yiayia showed me why this matters.

4

Agency Owner Today

Assisting Hands Home Care of Melrose Park — still in the homes, having this exact conversation.

The One Thing

Help people create better connections through intentional communication.

What We'll Cover

1

The 40/70 Rule

One simple idea about timing

2

Four Real Conversations

Driving, safety, "I'm fine," and family

3

Bringing It Together

What ties every hard talk together

4

How We Help

What comes next, if you want it

THE 40/70 RULE

[The sister who waited too long]

**When your parents are around 70,
and you're around 40 —
start the talk.**

Not the whole talk. Just the beginning.

Before the fall. Before the diagnosis.

THE 40/70 RULE

Why It Matters — and Where to Start

SOURCES THAT AGREE

- AARP
- National Institute on Aging
- Family Caregiver Alliance

*“There is kindness
in being direct.”*

— Jefferson Fisher, *The Next Conversation*

A GOOD FIRST SENTENCE

*“I’ve been thinking about the future.
I want to know what matters most to you.”*

⇒ TURN & TALK (2 min)

*Think of one small sign you’ve noticed in your own parent or loved one.
What’s one opening moment you could try this month?*

PART TWO

Four Conversations You're Probably Having Right Now

Starting the talk · Driving · “I’m fine” · Family alignment



SCENARIO A

Starting the Conversation

A daughter has noticed small things — a pot left on the stove, pills mixed up — and has rehearsed this talk a dozen times in her head.

“A conversation withheld out of love is still a conversation your parent doesn't get to be part of.”



COMMUNICATION TOOL

Jefferson Fisher — Kindness in Directness

Say the specific, true thing you noticed — gently, without a list of examples stacked on top of it. One observation, then listen.

TRY THIS

“I noticed ___. How are you feeling about things at home lately?”

NOW WHAT

Plan on this taking 3–4 separate conversations, not one. Each one just needs to get a little further than the last.

⇒ TURN & TALK (2 min)

What's one specific thing you've noticed — not a feeling, an actual detail — that you could name out loud this month?



SCENARIO B

The Driving Conversation

A daughter knows her father should stop driving. He's backed into the mailbox twice, missed a stop sign, came home confused.

“Don't pull on the rope. Find the knot.”

The knot: What is the unspoken issue that is holding everything back?



COMMUNICATION TOOL

Jefferson Fisher — Find the Knot

The visible disagreement (the keys, the money, the move) is rarely the real one. The knot isn't the keys — it's the world the keys represent: independence, identity, a standing appointment with someone they love.

TRY THIS

“What would you miss most if you couldn't drive? Help me understand.”

NOW WHAT

Write down what they say — literally, on paper. Solve for the world behind the keys before you solve for the keys.

⇒ TURN & TALK (2 min)

What's the “world behind the keys” for your parent — driving, their kitchen, their home, something else?



SCENARIO C

When They Say “I’m Fine”

A daughter's mother fell once last month and has been skipping meals. “I’m fine,” her mother says. “I don’t need some stranger in my house.”

“It sounds like the idea of someone new in your home feels like giving something up.”



COMMUNICATION TOOL

Chris Voss + Vanessa Van Edwards

Voss calls this “labeling” — name the feeling before the fact. Pair it with Van Edwards' warmth & competence: warmth so they feel cared for, competence so they trust you have one small, workable next step.

TRY THIS

“It sounds like... / It seems like this is a lot to take in.”

NOW WHAT

1. Label the feeling first.
2. Name only what you noticed — one detail.
3. Offer one small, low-commitment next step.

⇒ TURN & TALK (2 min)

What's one “I'm fine” you've heard from your own parent — and what feeling might actually be underneath it?



SCENARIO D

Getting Family on the Same Page

Three adult siblings sit down after their mother's fall. The oldest is exhausted, the distant brother feels guilty, the youngest feels left out.

“How can we make this work for all three of you — and for your mother?”



COMMUNICATION TOOL

Chris Voss — Calibrated Questions

Calibrated questions start with “how” or “what” — never yes/no — so they can't be won, only answered together. If the conversation stalls, borrow Fisher's line: “Help me find the knot.”

TRY THIS

“How do we make this work for everyone?”

NOW WHAT

Before the meeting, write down what YOU need — not what you want your sibling to do. Listen for “that's right,” not just agreement.

⇒ TURN & TALK (2 min)

If you called a family meeting this month, who needs to be in the room — and what calibrated question would you open with?

Four Conversations, One Practice

Love

The courage to start the talk before the fall.

Attention

Listening for the feeling underneath “I’m fine.”

Generosity

Letting someone else help carry this — and letting your parent accept it too.

Philotimo

Having the conversation again, and again, because it's the right thing to do.

“Be brave enough to say what love is asking you to say.”

BONUS TOOL

The Four Sentences

“Please forgive me.” “I forgive you.” “Thank you.” “I love you.”

Ira Byock, *The Four Things That Matter Most* — say one this week, before you need it.

The Legal Reality Without a Plan

No POA. No guardianship. A parent who can no longer decide. Here's what's actually true.

WHAT'S TRUE RIGHT NOW

- No one — not a spouse, not an adult child — can legally make financial decisions for your parent without written authority.
- Hospitals need a medical decision-maker. Without a signed healthcare POA, Illinois law falls back on a default list (spouse, adult child, parent, sibling) — but that only covers medical care, not money or housing.
- Once a parent can no longer understand what they're signing, they legally cannot create a new POA. That window has closed.

WHAT COMES NEXT

- The fallback is guardianship — decided by Probate Court, not by family agreement.
- In Illinois, courts can grant emergency or temporary guardianship within days when there's real risk of harm. It lasts up to 60 days while a full case is prepared.
- The first document you'll need is almost always a doctor's written opinion on capacity.

What To Do Right Now

1

Get a written capacity evaluation today.

Ask the treating doctor. This one document unlocks almost everything else — POA activation, guardianship petitions, insurance and Medicaid decisions.

2

If there's a window of clarity, use it.

Capacity isn't all-or-nothing. A parent who struggles with some decisions may still be able to understand and sign a simple healthcare or financial POA in a lucid moment.

3

If that window has closed, call an elder law attorney now.

They can file for emergency or temporary guardianship in Probate Court — Cook County can move quickly when there's documented risk.

4

In the moment, don't try to convince.

Stay calm, keep instructions to one step at a time, and redirect rather than correct. Arguing with confusion tends to escalate it — the bigger conversation can wait until things are stable.

This is general information, not legal advice — an elder law attorney licensed in your state can tell you exactly what applies to your family.

HOW WE HELP

You Stay the Son or Daughter. We Help Carry the “Now What.”

1

A Free In-Home Assessment

A clear, honest picture — competence, delivered with warmth.

2

Help Starting the Conversation

In-home, alongside your family — not instead of you.

3

A Consistent, Trusted Caregiver/Care Team.

A steady presence your parent gets to know.

4

Ongoing Support

So the follow-through doesn't rest on you alone.

φιλότιμο

Thank You

Questions? We've saved time for them.

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assistinghands.com/148/illinois/melrosepark

REFERENCES

Sources for This Session

COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORKS

- Jefferson Fisher — The Next Conversation
- Chris Voss — Never Split the Difference
- Vanessa Van Edwards — Cues
- Ira Byock — The Four Things That Matter Most

AGING & CAREGIVING RESOURCES

- AARP — aarp.org/caregiving
- National Institute on Aging — nia.nih.gov
- Family Caregiver Alliance — caregiver.org
- AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety