



As we age there may come a time where we will need the assistance of others to manage our finances and / or our estate. It's important to discuss these questions with your parent or parents while they are healthy and of sound mind in order to prepare for the future.

Keep in mind that while your parents need to keep a sense of control, you want to be knowledgeable enough to be in a position to assist them if needed. It's important to keep up to date with any changes in your parent's feelings and his or her financial and estate plans. These questions should be a continuous dialogue.

1. "Do you have a trusted financial advisor?" If your parents do not currently use the services of a professional advisor, should they consider starting a relationship with one? If they have an advisor, do they trust him or her? If not, now may be the time to suggest making a change. Everyone should maintain a list (or a collection of business cards) with the names and telephone numbers of their personal professional advisors (accountant, attorney, financial coach) for a spouse or children. This avoids a search through documents or statements to find names, addresses and telephone numbers.

2. "Do you have an estate plan?" Do your parents have a will and other legal documents in place to facilitate the efficient transfer of their estate to their designated beneficiaries? Are your parent's assets owned in the most tax efficient manner to minimize any potential estate taxes? Are your parents planning to leave a portion of their estate to charity? Do they have any special wishes for specific possessions? If so, it's good to know so you can make sure their wishes are carried out. Wishes regarding possessions should be written out in a letter. All too often rifts are created in families because one sibling took something that another sibling says their mother or father had always promised them. Many times things go to whoever gets to the house first. Having something in writing can prevent disagreements and grudges.

It is a good idea that the beneficiaries be informed of the parent's plans. You may wish to have a family meeting to review your parents' plans. This prevents hard feelings or disagreements between siblings or family members because the entire family understands what the parents have planned and why they have planned that way.

3. "Where do you keep these important papers and legal documents?" It is important to make sure that you or someone in your family knows where your parent(s) keep their important legal documents. Are they stored somewhere that you can access them? If your parent maintains a lockbox, are you or another family member listed on the account to allow you to gain access to their documents after their death?

4. "Do you have plans for someone to handle your finances if you become ill?" In other words, "Do you have a durable power of attorney?" The durable power of attorney allows an individual to designate someone else to handle their financial matters in the event that they are unable to. An example of the importance of this document may be to allow a spouse to tap into their spouse's retirement account to pay for living expenses or medical bills. Without a power of attorney the spouse would not be able to access the account without being appointed by a court.

5. "If you should become seriously ill, what type of care and intervention would you like?" Do your parents have a living will? This document will instruct doctors and other medical personnel of their wishes to be maintained on life support and other health related decisions.

6. "What types of insurance do you have (life, long-term care, liability)?" Are your parents adequately insured?

7. "Are you comfortable with your current doctors?" Are your parent's doctors familiar with the health issues that face older individuals? The Doctor's name, area of practice and information should be on a list and maintained with the important legal documents. Not only is it important to maintain each doctor's information, but a brief description as to why your parent is seeing that doctor is helpful.

8. "Can we make your home more comfortable?" Make sure that your parents are comfortable in their home and that all routine maintenance is addressed. Are they able to get around the house easily? Are they having trouble with the stairs? Is it time to start looking for a new place to live or to downsize? Would they be happier elsewhere?

Commonly we hear of couples that stay in their home because they want to keep it for their children. This should be discussed with the children because in many cases the children don't want to live in the home and simply wish to retain the value.

9. "Are you feeling secure about driving?" This is probably one of the most challenging issues to discuss since driving is a source of independence. It is often difficult to accept and give up but it's important to realize that this affects many other people. Don't wait until something happens before suggesting that your parent not drive anymore.

10. "What are your thoughts with respect to your funeral?" "Have you pre-paid for any expenses?" We were once told of a father who had prepaid all of his burial expenses and had a shoebox with all of his preferences on how he would like to be buried and what he would like read and sung at his funeral. His children found that having the arrangements and planning taken care of was a wonderful gift at such a sad time. This is your opportunity to talk with your parents about their plans and what they would like. Ask them to share their thoughts and plans about their funeral. Have they pre-paid for any expenses or planned for any portion of it? If they have prepared plans, where have you put them? The last thing you want to find is the shoebox with all of their instructions after the funeral.

It's never easy to approach your parents to discuss these questions. We suggest that you start the conversation by asking them for advice. For example, tell them that you are putting a Durable Power of Attorney in place and ask if they have any wisdom or suggestions. You can then ask if they have a Durable Power of Attorney in place.

Once you've had a conversation with your parents, it may be helpful to schedule a meeting with their various advisors to get their point of view and recommendations. Also be sure to include all siblings in the dialogue and family discussion. No sibling wants to feel left out of the conversation or that one family member has all of the power in the relationship. In many cases it may be prudent for one sibling to handle these various matters because they live closer, but the plans should be discussed with everyone. Quite frequently a lack of communication can create a rift between family members.

Additional Resources

www.Careguide.com: The provider directory, offers a database by zip code for elder resources.

AARP: 800.424.3410 or www.aarp.org. A wealth of senior related information.

Eldercare Locator: 800.677.1116 or www.eldercare.gov. A database of more than 4,800 elder-care providers from the U.S. Administration on Aging.

Healthfinder: www.healthfinder.gov. A wealth of elder-care information from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Medicare: 800.633.4227, www.medicare.gov. A Resource for Medicare information. The Medigap Compare tool helps assess insurance policies.

Medline Plus: www.medlineplus.gov. Trusted health information for you. A service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.

National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers: 520.881.8008, www.caremanager.org. Access to more than 1,500 geriatric-care managers nationwide