

Conversation Starters

Recognize that, as their child, it requires a delicate balance to offer help in a way that does not demean your parent or make them feel like your child.

1. Ask the question: “What do you want me to do?” It is a great way to start the conversation. It gives them control and the opportunity to say “yes” to help without taking away independence because they are driving the solution.
2. At other times, offer several suggestions for them to choose from and then decide as a family on the best course of action. This is the start to a relationship based on teamwork.
3. If researching the answer to a problem is beyond your parents’ current coping mechanisms, with permission, do the research for them. It is important to concentrate on alternatives that honor that this is still their house and life.
4. When asked, give them your honest opinion.
5. Given your parents’ physical limitations, be careful not to say “let me do it,” or take something away and do it for them. I realized this when I had to stop myself from grabbing the ketchup bottle out of my mother’s hands to put some on her dish. Instead, say “Can I help you?” And then abide by their answer. I know sometimes you wind up cleaning up what they did for themselves and it’s frustrating. But we are back to not parenting our parents.