

Let's **talk** about care

Your guide to having constructive conversations with your loved ones, and coming to the right decision.



Information in this guide has been created and approved by the following health and care professionals:



Alexis Cable, Elder Clinical team

Alexis is a registered social worker. She's experienced in management in health and social care, as well as direct clinical social work practice with vulnerable adults and their families.

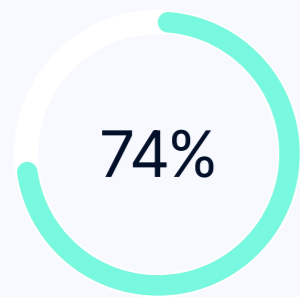


**Zoe Feldwick, MSc,
Integrative Therapeutic Counsellor**

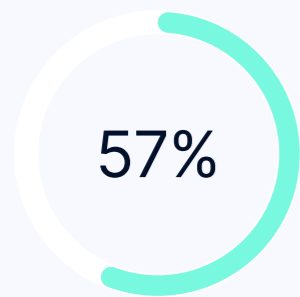
Zoe is a member of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists, and works with people experiencing anxiety, depression, bereavement, stress, trauma, and relationship issues.

Finding it tricky to talk about care? You're not alone

We surveyed over 700 people to better understand how families across the UK feel talking about care. Of the families who hadn't talked about care, 49% felt **emotional**, and 43% felt **anxious** at the prospect.



74% of people said they would find it difficult to bring up care with an older loved one.



57% felt particularly uncomfortable at the thought of discussing funding and finances with their older loved one.



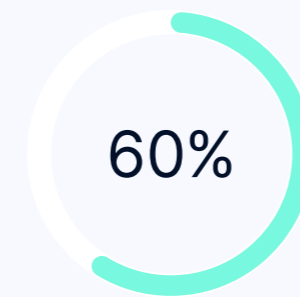
Just 27% of older people who felt they needed care had actually had a conversation with their family about it.

But it's not all doom and gloom

While we found that many people are worried about discussing care with their loved ones, those who have already talked about it generally found it easier in practice. Some of the most common feelings reported among survey participants when looking back at these conversations were '**calm**' and '**hopeful**'.



Just 32% of people felt 'uncomfortable' or 'very uncomfortable' when they discussed care with an older loved one.



60% of older people would actually prefer to have a thorough conversation about care before the need for it arises.



Over 3/4 of families largely agreed with the older person's care wishes.

How to have **difficult** conversations



Zoe Feldwick, MSc

Avoiding difficult topics such as care, unfortunately doesn't make them go away. By not discussing these issues with the people involved we aren't being honest. This can affect the way we feel about these people, and we might find that this impacts the way we relate and interact with them. If you're struggling to talk about certain topics with your family, here's some approaches you can try.

Taking a 'person-centred approach'

On a simplistic level, it means remaining mindful of -

- **empathy** (trying to understand the other's point of view)
- **congruence** (being genuine and authentic with the other person)
- **unconditional positive regard** (treating the other with respect and without judgement)

Ultimately, it's about respecting the other person and their experiences as a unique individual. Although we may feel we know what the right decision might be in relation to our values and experiences, this may not be aligned with their experiences.

Managing worries

We cannot predict how others might react, and uncertainty is uncomfortable. We might try and run through the worst-case

scenarios in our minds in order to prepare for a tough conversation. However, what tends to happen is we become more fearful of these invented scenarios, which leads to more worries.

Acknowledge these feelings without judgement or criticism – they're normal responses to stressful situations. Try to offer yourself something that moves you into a calmer state. This could be engaging in a hobby, a short breathing exercise (there are lots of apps available that offer guided meditation), taking a walk in nature, or talking to a partner or friend.





Feeling prepared

As a therapist, it's really important that I'm feeling as grounded as possible when I go into a session. If I'm feeling dysregulated or stressed, then I cannot be with other's distress or respond to their feelings in a compassionate or balanced way. I would approach difficult conversations in the same way.

Choose an environment that feels relaxed, safe and free of distractions for all parties. It can also be helpful to write down any key points or things you would like to say beforehand, as if we are stressed or anxious we can find it harder to recall information.

Communication and understanding

"I" statements can be really helpful, as they allow you to take responsibility for your own feelings and emotions, rather than coming across as persecutory towards others. Try following the format of "I feel (emotion/feeling) when (explanation). For example "I feel anxious when you are at home alone, I worry that there's no one there to help if an accident happens."

We can also say non-blaming things in a blaming way, so use a soft and even tone when speaking. Try to slow your speaking down if you feel yourself speeding up or rushing through.

End by agreeing on a date to reconvene. This should not be too far in the future, but should still allow enough time for everyone to process and reflect on what has been said.

You may not come to an agreed point of view straight away – and that is okay!

What if my loved one **refuses** care?

We all want the best for the people we love, which can make it all the more difficult when an older person refuses help. Coming together and agreeing on the best way forward can take a lot of effort and understanding.

A lot of refusals are based on 'what ifs'. A loved one may worry about losing control over the life they've built, or becoming a burden to others. Keeping them involved as much as possible and finding answers to their concerns can make a big difference to how they feel about care.

It may help to sit down together and think about their daily life - ask them which things they'd be comfortable having a bit of help with, and start there, however small. Make sure the conversation stays centred around their lifestyle and what's important to them.



Alexis says...

"A little empathy and positivity can go a long way toward convincing your loved ones to get the help they need. Make sure that your loved ones know that your requests are heartfelt and that you want them to be as happy and healthy as possible.

Make it clear that help isn't a limiting factor - in fact it's a form of support. Do not be afraid to stress to your loved ones that they are still making all the decisions and that any support is to make their lives easier."

The following questions may help get things started:

- What chores do you dislike or find most difficult?
- What hobbies and interests would be easier or more enjoyable with another person here?
- What places would you like to visit more if you could?
- What meals or foods do you enjoy but find difficult to prepare?
- Have you been finding it difficult to remember certain things?
- Would you like someone to take the pressure off keeping appointments?

Ask a health professional for help

If a loved one refuses to talk about care with you, try asking a doctor or nurse to discuss it with them instead. People are sometimes more willing to listen to a health professional.



Alexis says...

"It is important to work out what you are looking for and set out a list of must haves, nice to haves, and deal breakers. The person who'll receive the care may be looking for different qualities and you may be surprised at how they would rank the skills and abilities you value.

Try to take off the pressure by keeping in mind that nothing is totally set in stone, some companies, including Elder, can set up trial weeks to help you try things out and find the right fit."

Overcoming concerns: Real life stories

Concern: “A professional carer will try to change everything.”

Care at home allows people to maintain their own lifestyle, in their own homes. It should improve daily life – not take away from it. In fact, **98%* of people receiving live-in care say it’s helped them have a better quality of life.**

**Source: The Live in Care Hub Better at Home Report*

“Having someone different in the house was a big thing for my parents. Carers have to fit around my mother and learn how she and my dad like things done, as they like things a certain way and according to a set routine.

It can be hard to find the perfect person, on both sides, but we have now with Donika. She fitted in very quickly! She goes the extra mile, and she will rush to help my mother before she’s even asked, even in the middle of the night.

She knew how to play dominoes after watching me and Dad.... She speaks loudly and clearly, and she knows to say the right things at the right times. Having lived in Scotland for many years, there’s a strong cultural bond too.”

– Elder customer Ian

Concern: “Accepting help is a sign of decline”

People of all ages employ cleaners, dog walkers, and use meal services. Using outside help is often just a sign that you want to spend your time doing things you enjoy, while the things you find difficult are taken care of.

“There are so many things about staying at home – what it lets Mum do. She likes to be in control, so Rose lets her do what she still can. She might say ‘it’s your turn to make tea, Patricia’, and then she will help her make it only if needed. Mum doesn’t always remember how to do everything, but it makes her happy to be involved.”

– Elder customer Joanne





Overcoming concerns: Real life stories

Concern: “What if we don’t get on with the carer?”

Finding companionship is just as important as a person’s physical health and wellbeing. It’s why at Elder, we look at both care needs and personality when matching older people to carers, and always give them the final say.

“I liked that you got videos of the carers because you can better understand who someone is from a video compared to just a photo and profile description. This also meant I could show Mum and Dad and let them also have a say. This made getting a new carer less stressful for them, as they’d have an idea of who was coming into their home – as someone new moving into their home can be hard to accept.”

– Elder customer Sarah



Elder is a leading care marketplace – delivering over 10 million hours of care since 2016.

We create solutions for one of life’s biggest decisions by bringing together smart technology, clinical expertise, and personalised support.

Elder connects carers to older people so that they can live their own lives, in their own homes, while getting the personalised care they need.

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