Caregiving Relationships: Conversations on Aging

Session 1
Lifetime Relationships: Changes for Adult Children and Their Aging Caregiver Parent

Session 2

Authors:
Donna K. Donald and Sandra McKinnon, Family Life Program Specialists
Iowa State University Extension, August 2011

Adapted from:
Adult Children & Aging Parents: Conversations between Generations
Iowa State University Extension, EDC 237, Revised June 2002
Lifetime Relationships: Changes for Adult Children and Their Aging Caregiver Parent

Session 1 of 2
Caregiver’s Perspective – Dad Ken and Mom Jane

Ken is thinking: Jane and I spent the last 10 winters down south in our dream getaway home. But it is getting to be too much to drive and haul everything back and forth. And besides, many of our winter friends have entered nursing facilities, can’t make the trip, or have died. It just isn’t the same for us anymore. We’re not sure coming back home full-time is the best either.

We are both growing older. My eyesight doesn't allow me to drive anymore. It is harder for Jane to keep up with everything. When we got married, I vowed to take care of her, and that’s what I’ll do. Lately our youngest, Nancy, has been prying about our health. And we never see our son, Steve and his family. We don’t like either of the kids telling us what to do. We will be fine on our own.

Jane is thinking: Ken has been hovering lately. I know he is thinking I have “lost my marbles” because I changed some of our favorite recipes. Maybe it is just because I’m getting old. I mean, I can’t seem to remember things as easily as I used to.

Questions from Ken and Jane’s perspective

- What are some of the changes and losses Ken and Jane are facing?
- What feelings might they have about these changes?
- What can stay the same for Ken and Jane?
- What will change for Ken and Jane?
- Could there be positive outcomes for the couple as a result of these changes?
**Family’s Perspective** – Son Steve and Daughter Nancy

Son Steve is thinking: Nancy is making a big deal out of nothing. Mom was fine when I talked to her last week. When we visit, my wife now has to help out more in the kitchen preparing meals and she doesn’t like that. And it causes tension between my mom and my wife.

Daughter Nancy is thinking: Steve is never around in person so he doesn’t see how Dad is increasingly having to take care of Mom. With mom’s forgetfulness and dad’s poor eyesight, I worry about the medications each takes. And I’m pretty angry about always being the one to help my parents out.

Grandkids are thinking: We don’t visit grandma and grandpa as much as we used to. Dad says he is too busy and too far away. Grandma is just not the same; grandpa keeps telling us to be quiet. It just isn’t any fun anymore. And grandma left the chocolate chips out of our favorite cookies on our last visit.

**Questions from the family’s perspective**
- What are some of the changes or losses these family members are facing?
- What feelings or reactions might they have to these changes?
- What can stay the same for family members?
- What will change for family members?
Who’s Decision Is It?

The Move

Joe Simmons and his sister, Jackie, worry about their mom and dad being alone in the farmhouse. Dad is increasingly unsteady on his feet and needs help with taking care of himself. Mom is just a little thing and has her hands full with Dad. Neither Joe nor Jackie live nearby although they visit several times a year.

Joe’s feelings of guilt and his worries about their dad’s safety and mom’s health are interfering with his ability to do his job. Joe thinks their parents should move into an assisted living community. Joe is willing to contribute a little of his own income to make it affordable for their parents.

Jackie is sure their parents will not like the idea since they have clearly said they intend to stay on the farm. But she agrees it is probably best for their dad’s safety and will be easier for their mom.

Joe and Jackie made the down payment and plan to tell their parents that all the arrangements have been made for the move.

- Who has made the decision about where Mom and Dad Simmons will live? Why?
- What are the possible impacts of the decision on Joe and Jackie? On their parents?

Going to Grandma and Grandpa’s House

Grace Green has always been critical of her daughter, Bev. Howard just goes along with whatever Grace says. Now at 78 years of age, Grace insists that Bev and the grandchildren spend every Sunday at Grace and Howard’s home. She criticizes the work they do for her and complains that they should visit more often during the week.

Activity 1.2
Bev works at a demanding job. Her children, now in high school, resent being at their grandparents’ all afternoon every Sunday. Bev is worn out and angry with her mother. She is also growing resentful of her Dad and his inability to speak up. Bev knows she should change the routine to fit her schedule better, but it’s easier to just go along with her mother’s demands and avoid being hurt by Grace’s sharp tongue.

- Who makes the decisions about the time Bev spends with her parents?
- What feelings and reactions do Bev, her children, Grace and Howard have about the decisions that have been made?

**Caregiver’s Children**

Albert Olson’s stroke left him partially paralyzed, confused, and needing physical therapy twice weekly.

His wife, Lucy, has appreciated the extra help their son and his family give with errands and chores. Frequent visits and calls from their daughter who lives several hundred miles away are also a great help. Lucy is worried about how much time her adult children take away from their own jobs and families to help her and Albert.

The children are worried about Lucy. She tells them that for now she and Albert are getting along well and would like to stay in their own home. She recognizes they may need to make some changes in the future. Lucy has taken steps to learn more about a local home nursing service.

- Who should make decisions about the support Lucy and Albert need?
- Who is involved in the decision(s) that have been made so far?

---

**Activity 1.2**
Adults in caregiving roles in later life may experience losses and changes such as:

- Independence
- Self-image or identity
- Routines
- Companionship
- Physical health
- Sense of security
- Emotional health
- Isolation
- Social network
- Community ties

We experience changes and losses throughout a lifetime. Some changes are gradual and expected. Some are sudden or unexpected. Some of the feelings these losses may cause can include:

- Fear and vulnerability
- Anger and impatience
- Sadness and depression
- Worry and anxiety
- Grief
- Confusion
Some changes can seem ambiguous.

- Family members aren’t sure about what is lost and what remains the same.
- Uncertainty can be stressful.
- One way to help deal with the stress is to look for the positive impacts of change.

Changes in later life can bring:

- New richness to relationships
- Different experiences to share
- Satisfaction of providing support
- Clearer sense of priorities
- Compassion for others experiencing loss
- Appreciation for person in caregiving role

What are some of the positive outcomes of change as we see the caregiver in a caregiving role?

Handout 1.1

… and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.
PARENT/Adult Child Relationship

- The parent feels a strong need to control the child.
- As a parent grows older he may be especially fearful of increasing dependency because he does not trust his child’s ability to support or help him and because he feels he may be losing control in the family.
- The child may still react as a small child would – fearful of the parent’s disapproval and afraid of not being loved.
- The adult child may fear making decisions when the parent is no longer in control.

ADULT CHILD/Parent Relationship

- An adult child may feel her role as a helper for a parent with increasing needs for assistance obligates her to make all the decisions for the parent.
- Adult children making decisions for the parent may feel resentful of the burden and anxious about the outcome.
- The parent may feel helpless and marginalized.

ADULT/ADULT Relationship

- Parents and children see themselves as autonomous adults whose differing needs are equally important.
- They recognize that the decisions made affect all of them.
- They base their relationship on mutual respect as well as obligation.

Handout 1.2
Understanding Changes in Later-Life Families

Change is a part of the family experience. It can be gradual, expected, and welcome. Change also can be sudden, unexpected, and create a crisis. Family decisions about finances, housing, medical care, and other issues in later life are influenced by perceptions about the meaning of change and by family relationship patterns. This becomes more complex when caregiving becomes part of the dynamics.

Ask Yourself
- What familiar things have changed for me as my family gets older and a parent becomes a caregiver?
- Have I lost something because of change?
- Has a parent lost something because of changes in his/her life?
- Have I thought about how that person feels about changes in his/her life?
- What can stay the same despite change?
- What have we gained as a result of changes?

Family relationships often follow repeating patterns based on who is “in control.” Think about which of your family members traditionally makes decisions? Who talks? Who listens? Who is left out?

Family members can learn new ways to relate as they face decisions. In ADULT/ADULT relationships, adult children and parents recognize both their interdependence and the importance of individual autonomy.

Ask Yourself
- Do I relate to my parents as if we were adults?
- What old relationship patterns are barriers to our communication?

When changing situations in later life demand decisions, one of the first sticking points may be “who decides.” Many families find these questions helpful:

1. Is anyone’s safety or health seriously threatened?
2. Will the change(s) I think my parent(s) should make benefit me or them?
3. Whose quality of life is impacted? Who should decide what quality of life is acceptable?
4. What has to change? What could stay the same?

When family members hear each other’s needs and concerns, the door is opened for mutual problem solving to begin.
Key Points

- Growing older and caregiving roles differ for each individual and family.
- Troubled relationships may remain troubled; strong ones may be challenged.
- You are a son or daughter to your parent(s) regardless of your age. But your role can change when your parent becomes a caregiver.
- When one family member experiences change, everyone in the family can be affected.
- Even though change often involves the loss something familiar, change also can have positive impacts on our lives and relationships.
- Family decision making is influenced by relationship patterns between the parents and children and among the siblings.
- Relationship patterns can change.
- Decision making is influenced by each person’s perceptions about the meaning of change.
- Mentally capable persons not endangering others have a right to make decisions that affect their well-being.
- You can only make changes in your own way of thinking, feeling, or acting.
- When family members feel their needs and concerns have been recognized, the door is opened for mutual problem solving.
- Families solve problems in different ways because each family has its own history, values, and perspectives.
- Preparations for and adjustments to life changes are influenced by each person’s perceptions and feeling about change and loss, attitudes about personal autonomy, and relationship patterns.
- In ADULT/ADULT relationships, family members recognize both their interdependence and the need for individual autonomy.

Handout 1.4

Session 2 of 2
Example A
My folks don’t like to talk about the future, but they are increasingly frail. I’m worried about them and how they will take care of themselves. The other day I found that they’ve been eating most of their meals at the fast food restaurant. I know Mom’s blood pressure is high and all that salt can’t be good for either of them. When I asked her about it she just said, “It’s nice to go out.”

Questions from the adult child’s perspective
1. What do you wish you could talk about with your parents?
2. Why are those issues important to you?
3. Why are they so hard to talk about?

Example B
We’ve been thinking a lot about our health and the future these days. We’re only 70, but my husband struggles with a heart condition. I guess we should have talked with our children more about their dad’s health. When I told my daughter I’d be interested in living near her and the grandchildren if something happened to Dad she said, “Oh Mom, don’t be silly. You and Dad are young. It’s morbid to talk about dying.”

Questions from the parent/caregiver perspective
1. What do you think your parent would like to talk about with you?
2. Why is it important to them?
3. Why is it so hard to talk about?
Script A

Daughter: Mom, you look terrible. Are you sick?

Mother: (quickly annoyed) Of course not. I just didn’t get my nap in after lunch because I was waiting for a package in the mail. The mailman was late.

Daughter: (worried and frustrated) Well, it’s late. I have to get going and you need to fix supper.

Mother: Oh, we’ll just go over to the EatMore tonight.

Daughter: (horrified) Mom, you can’t keep eating all that salt! EatMore’s is the worst place in the world for a high blood pressure diet. I’ll just go get you something healthier at the store.

Mother: No dear. You go on home. Dad likes those Super Burgers and it’s nice not to cook.
Script B

Daughter: Mom, I’ve been noticing this afternoon that you seem extra tired. That worries me.

Mother: Oh, I’m fine dear. (pause ...) I haven’t been sleeping too well, I guess.

Daughter: I get frustrated when I can’t sleep. Any ideas about what is keeping you awake?

Mother: It is probably that new medication. I’ll get used to it. And then your Dad is so restless that I stay awake to be sure he’s OK.

Daughter: I didn’t think about that. Let’s see … you said you had a doctor’s appointment next week; maybe you can ask him about the medicine then. Well, it’s getting late. I should be on my way so you can fix your supper.

Mother: Oh, we’ll just go over to EatMore tonight.

Daughter: You’re really enjoying those big burgers, I guess!

Mother: Well, I’d rather stay here, but it’s the only way I can get your dad to eat. I’m really worried about him.

Activity 2.2

… and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.
**Preparation:** Copy this sheet on pink/color A card stock. Cut cards apart. Assemble 3 Talker/Listener pairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Talker A</strong></th>
<th><strong>Listener A</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have been thinking a lot about your health and future lately. Your husband has struggled with a heart condition for years, but doesn’t talk about it much to the family. You want to tell your adult daughter that you’d be interested in living near her and the grandchildren if something happened to your husband.</td>
<td>Your mom is telling you about her health concerns and plans for what would happen if your dad died. You hate talking about these things. You are busy with work and family right now and your parents still seem young. Somehow it seems morbid to talk about dying, but you know this is important to her. <em>Your goal for listening is to find out what plans she really wants to make.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Talker A</strong></th>
<th><strong>Listener A</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have been thinking a lot about your health and future lately. Your husband has struggled with a heart condition for years, but doesn’t talk about it much to the family. You want to tell your adult daughter that you’d be interested in living near her and the grandchildren if something happened to your husband.</td>
<td>Your mom is telling you about her health concerns and plans for what would happen if your dad died. You hate talking about these things. You are busy with work and family right now and your parents still seem young. Somehow it seems morbid to talk about dying, but you know this is important to her. <em>Your goal for listening is to find out what plans she really wants to make.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Talker A</strong></th>
<th><strong>Listener A</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have been thinking a lot about your health and future lately. Your husband has struggled with a heart condition for years, but doesn’t talk about it much to the family. You want to tell your adult daughter that you’d be interested in living near her and the grandchildren if something happened to your husband.</td>
<td>Your mom is telling you about her health concerns and plans for what would happen if your dad died. You hate talking about these things. You are busy with work and family right now and your parents still seem young. Somehow it seems morbid to talk about dying, but you know this is important to her. <em>Your goal for listening is to find out what plans she really wants to make.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Talker B
Your dad had several falls this last year. He is a big man and your mom can barely handle getting him up. They live in a house with the laundry room in the basement and the bedroom upstairs. You would like your parents to consider moving to the assisted living apartments in town where they could have everything on one level and have help with meals and housekeeping. You are talking to your brother, who hasn’t visited your parents for a long time, about your concerns.

Listener B
Your brother is talking about how well dad and mom are getting along. He doesn’t think there are any problems with the current housing situation. You’re not sure you agree. Your goal for listening is to find out why your brother is so convinced your parents should continue living in the house.

Talker B
Your dad had several falls this last year. He is a big man and your mom can barely handle getting him up. They live in a house with the laundry room in the basement and the bedroom upstairs. You would like your parents to consider moving to the assisted living apartments in town where they could have everything on one level and have help with meals and housekeeping. You are talking to your brother, who hasn’t visited your parents for a long time, about your concerns.

Listener B
Your brother is talking about how well dad and mom are getting along. He doesn’t think there are any problems with the current housing situation. You’re not sure you agree. Your goal for listening is to find out why your brother is so convinced your parents should continue living in the house.

Talker B
Your dad had several falls this last year. He is a big man and your mom can barely handle getting him up. They live in a house with the laundry room in the basement and the bedroom upstairs. You would like your parents to consider moving to the assisted living apartments in town where they could have everything on one level and have help with meals and housekeeping. You are talking to your brother, who hasn’t visited your parents for a long time, about your concerns.

Listener B
Your brother is talking about how well dad and mom are getting along. He doesn’t think there are any problems with the current housing situation. You’re not sure you agree. Your goal for listening is to find out why your brother is so convinced your parents should continue living in the house.
### Preparation
Copy this sheet on blue/color C card stock. Cut cards apart. Assemble 3 Talker/Listener pairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talker C</th>
<th>Listener C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Your parents are in good health but seem to be spending an awful lot of money. They buy expensive gifts for the grandchildren, have taken several expensive trips, put an addition on the house, and purchased an RV. You are pretty sure they haven’t ever had a lot of extra money. You’ve decided to ask your parents about their future plans. Do they have a will? What do you want to do if one or both of them needs long-term care assistance? How good is their insurance?** | **Your son wants to talk to you about your finances. You and your spouse have always kept money discussions private. Yet you think you should at least hear what he has to say.**  
**Your goal for listening is to find out why he is concerned and what he thinks you should do.** |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talker C</th>
<th>Listener C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Your parents are in good health but seem to be spending an awful lot of money. They buy expensive gifts for the grandchildren, have taken several expensive trips, put an addition on the house, and purchased an RV. You are pretty sure they haven’t ever had a lot of extra money. You’ve decided to ask your parents about their future plans. Do they have a will? What do you want to do if one or both of them needs long-term care assistance? How good is their insurance?** | **Your son wants to talk to you about your finances. You and your spouse have always kept money discussions private. Yet you think you should at least hear what he has to say.**  
**Your goal for listening is to find out why he is concerned and what he thinks you should do.** |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talker C</th>
<th>Listener C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Your parents are in good health but seem to be spending an awful lot of money. They buy expensive gifts for the grandchildren, have taken several expensive trips, put an addition on the house, and purchased an RV. You are pretty sure they haven’t ever had a lot of extra money. You’ve decided to ask your parents about their future plans. Do they have a will? What do you want to do if one or both of them needs long-term care assistance? How good is their insurance?** | **Your son wants to talk to you about your finances. You and your spouse have always kept money discussions private. Yet you think you should at least hear what he has to say.**  
**Your goal for listening is to find out why he is concerned and what he thinks you should do.** |

*Activity 2.3*
“I” Statements – A tool to say what you mean
An “I” statement expresses how a situation affects you without telling the other person what he/she must do. We express how we feel without blaming or accusing the other person. When using “I” statements we are careful not to say how the other person makes us feel.

How to make an “I” statement
1. Express your own personal concern or need – I feel, I need, I like
2. Clarify why or when this feeling or concern occurs – when, because
3. Suggest what you’d like to have happen – I hope, I wish, I would like

How not to make an “I” statement
“I” messages become ineffective if used to express what you think the other person should feel or do.

“I” statements:
• Require an attitude of wanting to engage in problem solving rather than an attitude of knowing the answer.
• Clarify your feelings and goals. By stating them as “yours,” the other person can feel free to disagree and share his/her perceptions of the situation.
• Are not magic. Using them won’t force someone else to share his/her thoughts.
• Are not intended to be used as a way to force your solutions on someone else.
**Active Listening – A tool to hear what they say**

When you focus on listening actively and effectively, you help build a bridge toward more meaningful conversations.

When you listen well to another person, you hear his/her words and you also remember how losses, fears, embarrassment, or other feelings may influence the words.

Active and effective listening also means noticing what someone *doesn’t* say.

**Techniques to Active Listening**

Show acceptance:
- Verbally … by naming the feelings you hear
- Non-verbally … by being attentive, showing expression

Clarify what you hear:
- Check perceptions, restate the words or paraphrase

To be an effective listener, there are other things to remember:
- Remember that a person has the right to make decisions about his/her own life.
- Be clear about what you can and can’t do.
- Try to show that you understand and appreciate what the other person can and can’t do.
- When you listen effectively, you recognize old patterns and don’t expect to change them.
- Best of all, when you practice effective listening, you lay the groundwork for future problem-solving conversations.

---

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.
Think through the issue; plan your approach.
Clarifying for yourself what your concerns are can make you more comfortable and help you practice what you might say. Ask yourself why the issue may be difficult for you and for your parent.

Be responsible for your own concerns.
Talk about how a situation affects you. Don’t tell the other person what he/she must do.

Write a letter or list to discuss.
Writing your thoughts down can help you sort them out, but giving that list to someone else might not always be the best approach. Some people are less defensive if they can first react to written communication in private and at their leisure. Others might feel threatened or react defensively because they are more accustomed to talking things out.

Emphasize independence.
New ideas are almost always easier to accept if they bring a real benefit. For example, “Having the visiting nurse stop by twice a month would save you having to make so many doctor’s appointments,” or “This cell phone would mean you could keep taking your long walks alone.”

Keep an open mind.
Remember, you cannot change another person without his/her willingness to change. You can only make changes in your own way of thinking, feeling, or acting.

Start small; don't push the issue.
Change is difficult. People can’t deal with too many new ideas at one time. Don’t introduce difficult topics when there is already a crisis. Try to choose times when you aren’t tired or hurried. Think about possible distractions.

Handout 2.2
Use natural openers.

Sometimes issues arise naturally. Example: a family friend is moving to another home; a relative is sick and needs assistance; you and your mom are cleaning house and she mentions how good it is to have help.

Try a “news hook.”

Sometimes it is easier to talk about things indirectly. Mention something you and a friend talked about, an article, an experience you’ve had, and use it to ask a question: “I heard something on TV last week that got me thinking. Have you and Dad ever heard of an advance directive for health care?” or, “Bob and I are working on designating power of attorney. How have you handled that?”

Back off; try another time.

If a person isn’t ready to talk, be patient. Sometimes we need time to gather thoughts and information before we can return to the topic. Thinking time is productive time.

Revisit big decisions.

Difficult topics can’t be resolved in one discussion. Example: “I’m glad I know what you think about this. Let’s talk more in a couple of weeks when I come back.”

Enlist those with “listening leverage.”

Sometimes another person can talk more easily – and more effectively – about a situation and your concern. Because you have a particular role in your family, a doctor, peer, or friend may be in a better (neutral) position to bring up a difficult issue such as hiring in-home help. Who else might your parent listen to without feeling so threatened?

… and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Handout 2.2
Caregiving Relationships: Conversations on Aging

Key Points

- Family history, family roles, fear of changes, embarrassment, or grief are some of the reasons families may find it difficult to talk about and plan for changes in later life.
- When families bring up sensitive issues, problem solving may be blocked because individuals can’t express their real concerns or don’t hear the concerns of others.
- When you talk about how a situation affects you, without telling the other person what he/she must do, you allow the other person to give you new information or help you see the situation differently.
- When you listen well to another person, you hear his/her words and you also remember how losses, fears, embarrassment, or other feelings may influence the words.
- It is never too early, or too late, to practice using communication tools like “I” statements and active listening skills.
- Active and effective listening also means noticing what someone doesn’t say.
- In any relationship you can only make changes in your own way of thinking, feeling, or acting. You cannot change another person without his/her willingness to change.
- Each family member has needs, wishes, and the right to make decisions about his/her own life. By being clear about what you can and cannot do, you act as an adult. By trying to understand and appreciate what your parent can or cannot do, you treat him/her as an adult.
- As with any successful negotiation, sensitive discussions can be influenced by individual preparation, timing, and follow-up.

Handout 2.3