



Change the Conversation

*by Mary Berk, LCSW
Certified Mediator
Family Mediation & Conflict Coaching
Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc..*

Why is it worth the risk to extending an invitation to your family for help?

- Early openness and honesty reduce the chances of hurt feelings and family conflict down the road.
- The chances of all the care falling on one person are reduced. When boundaries are respected people are much more willing to do their share.
- Family members don't want to feel left out. They want to feel that their involvement is important to their loved one.
- Family members experience a sense of loss as their loved one changes. Involvement in that journey is one of the ways to manage that sense of loss.
- Our community and healthcare systems are fragmented and can be challenging for care partners. It is invaluable to have a supportive network that can assist with navigating systems as well as providing emotional support.

Questions? Comments? Let me know!

Email: mberk@lifespan-roch.org

[Use fillable contact form](#)

Phone: 585-244-8400 ext 170

Last month I suggested that care partners seriously consider involving their family members as early as possible in the journey of caregiving. You may be reluctant to involve them. You may be afraid of what they'll say. In some ways, deciding to go it alone or relying only on your care partner can seem easier.

Communication patterns within families are well established as the family ages. Everyone knows 'the rules' defined by history, unmet expectations and implied expectations. Adult children may have their own lives and priorities, but they are not immune from the influence or the importance of their first family.

Involving your family members is a conversation that begins with you. It is helpful if you initially share your thoughts with as many family members as possible at a family meeting. In mathematics the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. In families the shortest distance between estrangement and engagement is honesty, respect, and openness. It is less about what you say than the sincerity with which you say it.

Example:

'I have been diagnosed with X. I'm told it's likely to get worse and they expect I won't be able to live independently indefinitely. I want to be honest with you about my diagnosis and I hope you will be honest with me about whether you want to be involved as it progresses. If so, there are many ways you can help. This is new territory for all of us and I don't know exactly what is needed at this point. Please be honest about your time limitations and types of care you feel able to provide (support, errands, etc.) I understand that you have your own lives and responsibilities. I will be grateful for any type of involvement you choose.

When you extend an invitation, you have given the family permission to talk about the situation, and permission to determine their level of involvement. You have modeled courage – the courage to face a loss of independence and the courage to acknowledge that you need them. Beyond that, you cannot control how they respond. They are adults and they will make their choices.

When you are open and honest with your loved ones, you give them the opportunity to be open and honest with you.