



Us & Coronavirus: A Guide to Planning with Parents and Elders During the Pandemic

(Portions of this guide were originally published on [ImpactADHD.com](https://www.impactADHD.com), a wonderful resource for parents of complex kids)

Life has suddenly changed, and your loved ones over 60 are most at risk.

There are several important conversations to have with your parents and elders sooner rather than later. But don't worry, you don't need to cover these topics in one sitting. Instead, it's best to have a series of conversations over time.

Staying Safe

It's the ultimate role reversal from when you were a teenager: parents going about their regular lives, refusing to listen to your advice about being more careful. It's extremely common right now, and very frustrating for many adult children.

It is worth talking with them specifically about frequent handwashing, avoiding gatherings whether indoor or outdoor, reducing the number of errands they're running for themselves, hand sanitizer, all of the basics.

But it's not just about being careful. There are two primary areas where we need to balance competing priorities:

- *Safety vs. Independence*
Independence is a primary value in our society, and we don't let go of that value as we age. The question for each of us is, ultimately, *how much independence are you willing to sacrifice in order to stay safe?* After you discuss the options, as long as they have the mental capacity to do what's in their own best interest, give parents the latitude to decide how much they're willing to give up in order to stay safe.
- *Quantity of Life vs. Quality of Life*
Instead of focusing solely on keeping your parents alive, remember also to focus on creating the best quality of life for the longest time possible. Remember, quantity of life is not everything. *Is it really better to sacrifice the very things that make life worth living in order to stay alive?*

There is no way to keep any of us completely 'safe', including your parents, no matter how hard you try. Life has an element of randomness that simply can't be controlled. Share your concerns and remind them why their continued presence matters to you, then respect the choices your parents make.

Going Deeper

What makes life meaningful to you?

What are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of more time?

What are you not willing to sacrifice for the sake of more time?

Mental and Physical Health

Do your parents need help with basic needs like food and medications? Even from afar you can help develop a plan.

- Check in by phone or video daily to see how they're doing, what they're eating and how they're sleeping. Make sure they're engaging in some kind of movement every day.
- Introduce them to the connections and activities available online, including video dinner dates, museum visits, theater, and picnics by the sea.
- Isolation and depression are big risks. Encourage them to go outside and to interact with others in the agreed-upon ways, following current local guidelines. A dose of sunshine does a heart good.
- Activities and rituals help them feel vibrant and alive. Help them develop a daily routine and tiny rituals that will help them find enjoyment and meaning even while isolated.
- Give them tips to stay safe financially as scammers are skilled at preying on their enhanced fears, particularly in this climate.

Going Deeper

What activities would you enjoy doing alone?

What activities could you enjoy with someone else from a distance?

What kind of daily routine would feel good?

**see Appendix for ideas and links to online options*

Essential Boring Stuff

If your parents don't have their affairs in order, you're the one who will pay the price when something happens. The right plan will make things as easy as possible in the most difficult moments of life. The estate planning documents parents need depend on their situation. At a minimum, every adult should have:

- *A Will*
- *Power of Attorney*
- *Healthcare Directives*
- *Universal HIPAA Release*

Without the HIPAA release, if a loved one over 18 lands in a hospital you may not even be allowed to talk to the doctors.

Some parents may also need a *Living Trust*, especially if they own real estate, which otherwise has to go through probate.

If their estate planning documents haven't been reviewed in the last three years, find an attorney who can review them now. Attorneys can review the documents remotely and ensure when their time comes you won't be stuck in the legal system.

Get contact information for their key neighbors and friends in case you have trouble reaching them. Find out where your parents keep their important records, including bank statements and real estate records.

While everyone is a bit concerned about money these days, more than likely your parents have the resources to take care of important planning, and the cost of not having a plan is much greater. Now is an ideal time, when taking care of ourselves and keeping ourselves safe is on everyone's mind.

Going Deeper

For parents and elders who live in Colorado, Hammond Law Group provides education and meetings to take care of estate planning needs from a safe distance, by phone & online

[Click here](#) for a list of upcoming webinars for Colorado residents (phone option avail)

[Click here](#) for general information on estate planning in Colorado

For parents and elders who live in the United States outside of Colorado, find an estate planning attorney in your area

[Click here](#) for a list of attorneys in the US offering estate planning with remote options

Strengthening Relationships

Last Christmas my friend was nervously telling me about the family gathering she had planned. When I inquired about her fear she shared, “I’m afraid we will all die off without ever having meaningful conversations.”

Now is the perfect time to have the conversations you’ve always wanted to have with your parents and loved ones. You have an opportunity to ask questions and invite deeper conversations. Draw out their stories, their proudest moments and biggest regrets. Ask how this compares to other crisis times they’ve lived through. If you knew you only had a week left with your loved ones, what would you want to talk about?

Going Deeper

**See Appendix for list of questions and conversation starters.*

The 'Mortality' Conversation (cue scary music)

Having your parents at risk is scary. It jolts you into the reality that we are all going to die. Including your parents. You get to decide how you show up for that journey. You can fight it, or you can decide to accept death as a part of life.

Death can be the inspiration for living fully now, while you can, and for talking about the deepest parts of ourselves. Conversations about mortality are virtually guaranteed to bring you closer to those you love. The greatest gifts are sometimes hidden in the hardest places.

Many people think that death is the opposite of life, but that's not quite accurate. Death is the opposite of birth, just as much a part of the human experience as birth is. Each of us is on the path of return. That's the way it works.

Chances are your parents have accepted the temporary nature of life and are hesitant to bring it up because they don't want to scare you. Talking about it with you will bring them great comfort. You can use this conversation to become a little less afraid of your own mortality as well.

Going Deeper

What makes life meaningful to you?

If you had one year to live, paint the picture of what you hope that year would look like?

What are your biggest fears and concerns about dying?

Where to Start?

Anywhere you start is fine, you'll build trust and confidence as you go.

None of these conversations is easy for everyone, some will be less comfortable for you and your loved ones based on your unique family personalities and patterns.

Some tips:

- Stay with it, even when it gets uncomfortable
- Listen and reflect back what you're hearing
- Once you've listened, say what you really want to say ... this isn't the time to shy away from sharing what you think and feel

And Finally...

What do your parents want you to know? That they will be okay, no matter what. They've lived lives that are full and rich and span many days, and what they want most now is for you to be safe and happy.



Catherine Hammond is an award-winning attorney, public speaker, author, and helper. As an attorney, she helps people plan for and walk through difficult transitions in life, including disability and death. She also serves as a transformational coach for people seeking to find depth and meaning in the challenges of life. The heart-wrenching experience of her mother's journey with early onset Alzheimer's, beginning when Catherine was still a teenager, was her inspiration to become an attorney.

Hammond Law Group, in Colorado, focuses only on estate planning and elder law. She is on the Board of Governors for the American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys. Through focusing her law practice only on estate planning and elder law, she gets to help others protect their loved ones from the unnecessary headaches and heartaches her family went through. For more information, visit www.ColoradoEstatePlan.com.

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Appendix A – Activity Ideas and Links

Regular connection with loved ones by phone or video
Have lunch, dinner, or tea with friends
Write notes to children and grandchildren
Read stories or books to grandchildren or other young people (by phone or video)
Teach someone what you know, by phone or video
Have a dance party (ask parents for favorite songs, create a playlist in Spotify)
Buy plants or plant seeds
Breathe deeply
Journal about your experience
Visualize (this is part of what carried Viktor Frankl through his time in a concentration camp)
Call someone you haven't spoken to in years

Online resources

Have a picnic by the sea or on a mountaintop, or eat at an Italian café ... virtually! Visit via [Google Earth](#) (Using Street view) and enjoy, safely.

Online yoga ([my daughter's website](#) will have free and paid options by Wed, March 25, 2020)

Take a [home safari](#) at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden.

Attend a [daily concert](#) with talented cellist, Yo Yo Ma, viewable on Facebook or Instagram.

Enjoy a variety of [musical performances](#).

Take a [virtual museum tour](#).

Take a trek, visit world famous landmarks, monuments, UNESCO world history sites, national parks, and more from the comfort of your own living room [here](#).

Watch a [Broadway play or musical](#).

Visit the [Monterey Bay Aquarium](#).

Take a [free online course](#) from an Ivy League School.

What you can do to support your self-isolated loved one

Send a card, deliver flowers

Write an old-fashioned letter

Send a voice memo or video they can watch on repeat

Go on a virtual tour together ... hop on Zoom, choose a destination from the virtual travel links above, share your screen, and experience it together

Appendix B – Great Questions and Conversation Starters

*Here are some starting places, let these questions inspire your own
Make this interactive, answer the same questions that you're asking your parents
Start an audio or video recording so you can capture the answers to these questions*

What was the happiest time of your life?
What was the saddest time in your life?
What's the biggest crisis you've ever lived through? What was that like?
What's one accomplishment you're most proud of?
What is your favorite memory of your father?
What is your favorite memory of your mother?
What activity or sport did you try as a kid and fail at?
Who had the most influence on you growing up?
What's one thing you wish you had done differently?
What hopes do you have for future generations of your family?
Is there an author or book that has influenced you more than others?
What advice would you give your family members?
What was your first job?
Who's someone you really admire?
What's a skill you learned when you were young that you still use today?
What's your love language?
If you could know when and how you will die, would you want to know?
What's something you will NEVER do again?
What's a habit you wish you could break?
What's the best job you've ever had? Worst job?
What's the best compliment you've ever received?
When you die, what do you want to be remembered for?
In what way do you feel your childhood was happier than other people's?
If you had to change your name, what would you change it to?
What is something you think everyone should do at least once in their lives?
What was the hardest decision you've ever had to make?
When was the last time you cried and why?
If you could buy your dream house, what is one weird room or feature you would have?
If you could solve one world problem, what would it be?
If you could create one holiday, what would you create?
If you were writing a book about your life, what would be the title?
If you could be famous, what would you want to be famous for?
If you could meet any historical figure, who would you choose and why?
If you could only eat one meal everyday for the rest of your life what would it be?
What's your most powerful and vivid memory?
What kind of people annoy you the most?