



Family Communication When Caring for Aging Adults

A practical guide for families navigating caregiving together

Why Conflict Happens

Caring for an aging loved one brings out the best, and sometimes the hardest, in families. Even well-intentioned relatives may disagree about care decisions, responsibilities, and what is best. Understanding why conflict arises is the first step to working through it.

Common sources of conflict:

- **Different priorities.** Safety, independence, finances, and social engagement: everyone weighs these differently.
- **Uneven responsibilities.** Those closest often carry more of the load, which can breed resentment over time.
- **Communication gaps.** Assumptions and avoidance grow into misunderstandings, especially at a distance.
- **Unresolved history.** Old family dynamics can resurface under stress.

Communication Tips That Help

- ✓ Acknowledge that everyone's perspective is valid, even when you disagree.
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions instead of making assumptions.
- ✓ Hold regular family check-ins with a clear agenda.
- ✓ Use shared apps (CaringBridge, Lotsa Helping Hands) to coordinate care.
- ✓ Save complex conversations for video or in-person meetings, not text.
- ✓ Remember: caregiver wellbeing matters too. Burnout affects everyone.

Mediator's Tip: *You do not need to agree on everything to move forward. Effective families focus on shared goals, honoring their loved one's dignity, rather than winning individual arguments.*

Family Meeting Checklist

- Set ground rules (one speaker at a time, no interrupting)
- Share a brief update on the care recipient's current needs
- Review who is responsible for what
- Discuss any upcoming decisions or concerns
- Agree on next steps and follow-up
- Close by acknowledging everyone's effort

When to Seek Mediation

Mediation is not just for legal disputes. It is a compassionate, structured process that helps families work through impasses, preserving relationships and honoring everyone's voice.

Consider mediation if:

- Conflict is ongoing and affecting family relationships
- Communication has broken down or stalled
- Decisions are urgent and emotions are running high
- There is a risk of family estrangement

Helpful Resources

Family Caregiver Alliance: caregiver.org
AARP Family Caregiving: aarp.org/caregiving
CaringInfo: caringinfo.org
CaringBridge: caringbridge.org
Lotsa Helping Hands: lotsahelpinghands.com
CareMobi: caremobi.com

Is your family navigating a difficult caregiving situation?

Harmony Path Mediation helps Colorado families find a path forward together.

www.mediation4colorado.com

Dianne Van Voorhees, Mediator, Attorney and Restorative Justice Facilitator | Harmony Path Mediation
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