

How to Avoid Butting Heads with Your Older Parents

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You can't eliminate all disagreements and uncomfortable situations with your older parents, but you can often resolve conflicts and make your relationships run more smoothly, if you just know how! The following 10 tips will help you avoid butting heads with your aging loved ones.

1. Start early. There are some issues that almost all caregivers will face at some point, including changing living arrangements, drawing up a will or giving up driving. If they haven't arisen yet, discussing them with your older family member before decisions *must* be made can be a lot less stressful. For starters – just click here and you can find a list of the [five most important legal documents](#) your parents need to have in place prior to a potential caregiving crisis.
2. Pick your battles. As a caregiver, you will most likely encounter situations where you have to override your parent's wish to keep him or her safe and well. But do so only when necessary! If your father wants to drive his car after his license has been revoked, for example, it's your responsibility to stop him. If he wants to wear red plaid pants with a blue striped shirt or put up his Christmas tree in August, let it slide.
3. Foster your parent's independence. Some older adults sit back and prefer to be waited on. But many would much rather do things themselves – if they can. By allowing your parents to do the tasks they are physically able to do you will help boost their self-esteem and maintain their independence. One great technology that emphasizes wellness, communication, autonomy and social connectivity is the [VTechCareLine™](#) - this easy-to-use home phone system was designed with experts in aging and technology to answer seniors' daily communications needs and support hearing, dexterity or vision challenges.
4. Enlist the help of professionals. Even though you may be closer to your aging loved one than anyone else, that doesn't mean you have to be the bearer of all bad news. If you think your mom needs to see a psychiatrist - or trade in her high-heel pumps for safer shoes - it might make sense to have a trusted doctor, social worker or gerontologist broach the subject with her. A great resource for professional guidance is the [National Association of Geriatric Care Managers](#).
5. Let your parents live in their own world. If your father's college football stories or your mother's insistence that she's never met your husband (despite the fact that she's known him for 30 years) drives you up a wall, don't let on. How many times has your child or best friend told you the same story over and over? Try acting amazed when you hear about that winning touchdown for the thousandth time or tell your mom that you'd love to introduce her to your husband (just make sure you let him in on the role playing!). If you feel your loved one is experiencing an unusual amount of memory loss you might want to go to the [Alzheimer's Association](#) website for additional information.

6. Don't make assumptions. If you need to make a decision regarding your loved one's care, don't always assume you know what's best for them. One article I read recently said that most caregivers thought aparent would be better off moving in with them, while most older adults said they would prefer to stay in their own homes or live in an assisted-living facility. If your parent is cognitively and mentally able to participate in decisions regarding his or her own care, by all means ask for input.
7. Consider your parent's feelings. It's not always easy getting older. If you look at things from your parent's perspective – and consider that you will most likely be in the same situation one day – you'll realize it's smarter to let go of past grudges that might lead to conflict and simply forgive. One of the reasons we tend to hold on to grudges is a sense of guilt – the overall feeling that we aren't doing enough for our aging loved ones, ourselves or anyone else for that matter! Click here to find my 10 tips for [saying goodbye to caregiver guilt](#).
8. Allow your parent to call the shots – sometimes. Many of the challenges that arise in caregiving come when parents feel they are no longer useful or in control. As with parenting your own child, it's important to give your parents some power in the family – particularly if he or she lives in your home with you. If possible, allow them to plan meals, or pick TV shows or family activities now and then.
9. Use positive reinforcement. It's easy to criticize when things aren't going well, especially when you're overwhelmed and exhausted. But instead of complaining when things go wrong, try praising your parent when things go right. Chances are your parent wants to please you and will appreciate the encouragement. The [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) offers four different online support groups for caregivers and their aging loved ones – these groups might just help ease the stress you're feeling and help you employ useful coping mechanisms.
10. Reconsider your arrangements. If constant conflicts with your parents are having a negative impact on your health and your immediate family, you may have no choice but to make other arrangements for their care. If he or she is living in your house, perhaps your parent could live with another family member or move into an assisted-living residence. If you're providing most of the care – perhaps another family member could take over some of the duties. If you're looking for a referral source to help you find a housing resource in your area, there's a great new website called www.caresquad.com that will point you in the right direction!

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