

Difficult Conversations We All Should Have - But, How & When?



Linda Fodri-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC
Founder and Executive Director of Eldercare Services and is a Fellow & past President of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (NAPGCM)

I have been doing a lecture entitled "The Elephant in the Room: The Difficult Conversations We All Should Have." Because of the feedback I have received, I thought I would share some of this wisdom with you this month.

The "Elephant," so to speak, is the unspoken issue that you or others are aware of, but no one says anything because it is a family "hot button" or it is a subject that means change or adjustment on the part of yourself or others.

For families dealing with issues on aging, the elephants run the gamut from end of life planning to re-marriage and/or how should I distribute my assets and personal items after I'm gone? One example of a participant's "elephant" may be the issue that his mother did not choose him to make decisions for her in a crisis, but chose another sibling.

Another way to identify an "elephant" that may need resolution is to think about issues that cause you sleepless nights or that you think about during the day, but never discuss with anyone. If this is the case, once the issue is explored and discussed - it should free you to sleep better.

The real reason for these discussions is to give you the life that you desire based on your values and to free you from guilt, worry or resentment. Sometimes, after the conversation, the outcome may differ from what you originally thought, but you will likely feel relieved.

A couple of hints before you begin to share your "elephant":

1. Timing is everything – don't surprise family or friends with the conversation at a seasonal family event or celebration.
2. Invite others to the discussion by starting with a statement about you such as, "I would like to talk to you all about something important to me." Don't say "We need to talk!" That will put people off. Give a date and a place that is peaceful. Keep the invitation simple; don't go into details.
3. Know the purpose of your discussion, what you want to accomplish and what your ideal outcome would be.
4. Practice (especially if it is a sensitive subject) in front of a mirror – notice your language and gestures. Make sure it isn't critical or condescending.
5. At the beginning of the discussion, ask to speak first about your decision or concern and how it is important to you for them to understand and/or support you.
6. Listen to the concerns and fears of others without being defensive.

For example, if your issue is about health care advocacy and decision making: 1) Discuss why you have decided to name a certain person as your Advanced Directive agent and name who the alternates will be should that first person not be available. 2) Be sure that everyone knows what you do and don't want in a medical crisis – especially if you have strong feelings. 3) Discuss the POLST (Physicians Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) form as to what you have chosen about receiving or withholding in regard to treatments and why you feel as you do. Be clear that you want your Advanced Directive/Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) agent to use this form to advocate for you on

your behalf.

If for any reason the discussion didn't go as you had envisioned, bring in an expert to help lead a family meeting. That could be a Professional Care Manager, Therapist, Religious Leader, Mediator or Legal Professional. In my case, as a certified Professional Care Manager, I would be certain that your point is made and understood and that everyone is heard. That doesn't necessarily mean compromise, but it does mean respecting everyone equally.

Whether it is something for which you want forgiveness from years ago or something new such as your plan to sell the family home and down-size, remember that every change we make or don't make comes with an emotional cost. And remember that the longer you hold onto an elephant, the more it has time to grow and the higher the cost when you try to move it out of your life.

If you are stuck and need a more personalized strategy for your "elephant," we have many licensed therapists at Eldercare Services to guide you.

May your "elephants" be small and your life full of those thoughts and feelings that bring you joy and comfort.



**Attention!
Bay Area
Family
Caregivers**

Upcoming Event in
San Francisco on
July 22nd at
The Commonwealth Club.
Eldercare Services Founder, Linda
Fodri-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC,
will give a talk on *The Elephant in the
Room: Difficult Conversations We All
Should Have*
More Info and to register:
<http://tinyurl.com/pspgmln>



**Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Lamorinda, Alameda County, San Francisco, San Ramon Valley and the Marin County , CA.
Visit us on the web at www.EldercareAnswers.com for more information.**

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

**Alzheimer's: 101 & Alzheimer's: 102
For Families Experiencing the Challenge**

**3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon
(Class topic alternates monthly)**

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Cost for Classes:

\$10 per person/\$15 per couple or 2nd family member

Proceeds to benefit the Alzheimer's Association

Class Registration:

Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., **Walnut Creek**, CA 94595

1st Thursday of every month from 5:15 to 6:45 PM

Glen Park Library, 2825 Diamond St., **San Francisco**

Cost for Support Groups: None

Support Group Registration: Not required

More Info: (925) 937-2018 or (415) 469-8300



Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com.