



How do I Talk to My Adult Children about Parkinson's?

Written By: Alana Wright

Let's face it, having tough conversations with your kids is never easy. Even when children become adults, you still hope to spare your child from stress and worry.

Receiving news that a parent has a chronic disease is likely to come as an emotional shock, even to adult children. There are a lot of ways an adult child might react to hearing this news. They may want to drop everything and rush to your side, feel helpless or guilty for not being able to do more, or they might shut down and need some time to process their emotions. There is no way for you to predict how your child might react, but you can do your best to be prepared for a conversation.

First, it's important to consider waiting until you feel comfortable and have all the information you need. By learning about your diagnosis, treatment plan, and prognosis before talking to your child, you can be more

prepared to answer any questions they may have. This allows you to give a complete picture of the situation, which may help in decreasing any worry they may have.

Second, it is important to be open and honest with your child. It can be difficult to share your emotions, especially if you are worried about burdening your child with your



feelings. However, if you're sad, worried, or angry, tell them – it encourages your child to be open about their feelings too. This will keep the conversation going and allow your child/children to feel included and involved. Encourage them to ask any questions they may have or learn about the disease with you. For example, if your children want to learn more about the disease, encourage them to do research or attend information sessions with you. Parkinson Association of Alberta offers a monthly PD 101 education session and 1:1/family sessions that are open to everyone. Both are a great place to ask questions and gain information about Parkinson's!

Third, let your child help! Most adult children want to be involved and would like to help one way or another! However, unless you raised mind readers, they may need you to tell them HOW they can help. Consider asking them to sit in on a doctor's appointment and take notes for you or drive you to an appointment, support group or exercise program. You can show your children how to navigate a diagnosis and teach them



skills such as asking for help, interacting with specialists, or advocating for yourself. Not only are you having a conversation with your child, but you are also encouraging them be involved.

Fourth, it's ok to say no and have boundaries. For some adult children hearing that their parent has an illness puts them into "go mode". They want to "fix" everything. And while the sentiment is heart-warming, it can feel overwhelming to the person on the receiving end. In this case a balance is best. Keeping children informed and encouraging them to get educated about Parkinson's, AND maintaining healthy boundaries are important.

At the end of the day, it can be hard to have these conversations with adult children. You were the one to raise them and were the person supporting them during difficult times. Now, it can sometimes feel like the roles are reversed, and that can be uncomfortable. It can be hard to see your adult child as someone you may be able to lean on for help, but they are there for you. Remember that your adult child can still have their own life while helping you. You can accept their help and still encourage them in their work, hobbies, and relationships. All you need to do to start is have a conversation!

