The holiday check in

How to have conversations about care

A guide for families who are starting to worry that something's not quite right.

Created by Clinical Psychologist Melissa Levi in partnership with Mable

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The holidays are often a time when families notice that Mum or Dad seems different. Maybe they're more forgetful, slower to follow a conversation, or less steady on their feet.

You might be wondering:

- "Is this just ageing, or something more?"
- "What if this is the start of dementia?"
- "What do I do next?"

Here's the good news: you don't have to work this out alone.
With Mable and Melissa Levi's Early Warning Signs Checklist, you can identify the warning signs that, when spotted early, can make a huge difference to Mum or Dad's health, safety, and quality of life.

The early warning signs checklist

Memory and thinking

- ◯ You notice they repeat the same questions or stories within a short period.
- ◯ They forget details of recent events or conversations that they'd usually remember.
- ◯ They lose track of what day it is, miss appointments, double-book themselves, or seem confused about plans.
- ◯ They struggle to follow or contribute to a group conversation.
- ◯ They appear more easily overwhelmed or anxious when too much is happening at once.
- ◯ They get lost or seem disoriented in a place they know well.
- ◯ They have unopened mail, unpaid bills, or are confused about managing money.

Everyday tasks and routines

- ◯ The fridge or pantry has spoiled or expired food, multiples of the same item, or is unusually empty.
- ◯ You notice clothing that's stained, worn repeatedly, or inappropriate for the weather.
- ◯ They look less well-groomed than usual (e.g. hair unwashed, clothes not matching, or unpleasant odours).
- ◯ The house or garden looks unusually messy, cluttered or neglected.
- ◯ They seem unsure how to use familiar appliances (microwave, TV remote, phone).
- ◯ They're no longer engaging in their typical routines and hobbies (e.g. morning walks, crossword puzzles, cooking).
- ◯ They've stopped attending regular activities, declined invitations, or spend most days at home.

Mobility and physical health

- ◯ You notice they are shuffling their feet, use furniture to steady themselves, or hesitate on stairs.
- ◯ Their walking looks different: slower, uneven, or stiffer than before.
- ◯ You notice new bruises or vague stories about "little bumps" or "nearly tripping".
- ◯ There have been one or more falls, even minor ones, in recent months.
- ◯ They struggle to get up from a chair or need more rest than usual.
- ◯ Their clothes seem looser or tighter; possible weight loss or gain.
- ◯ They have unexplained new scratches, dents, or damage on their car.
- ◯ During a short drive, you notice hesitation, missed turns, or slow reactions.
- ◯ They've mentioned getting lost or confused while driving, walking, or shopping.

Mood and personality

- ◯ You notice they seem more withdrawn, tearful, irritable, or flat.
- ◯ Their warmth, sense of humour or confidence seems to have faded.
- ◯ They seem to have lost interest in the things that used to bring them joy.
- ◯ They say things that seem out of character or slightly "off".
- ◯ You may notice slight changes in judgment, such as decisions that seem out of character (e.g., unusual or large purchases).
- ◯ Old friends or neighbours mention that they "seem different lately".

What this means

Please don't panic if you ticked a few boxes. This checklist isn't about diagnosis; it's simply about noticing changes, so your family can act early, not react later. Use what you find as a guide for gentle conversations and a GP visit in the new year. Together, Mable and Melissa Levi are here to help you through each step, and the following guides will take you through:

1. **How to talk to Mum or Dad about your concerns** – how to raise concerns with Mum or Dad, without conflict or "ruining Christmas."
2. **The next right step: Supporting Mum or Dad to see the GP** - what to say, what to ask, and how to get the right help.
3. **How to introduce home care successfully** – how to bring care into Mum or Dad's life positively and respectfully.

Each step will help you feel calmer and more capable, and enable Mum or Dad to receive the care they deserve.

Always remember, you don't need to figure this out on your own

With the right knowledge and support, we can genuinely make the journey ahead – whatever that might be for your family – that bit easier for you and the people you love most.



Melissa Levi - Clinical Psychologist

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How to have conversations about care

How to talk to Mum or Dad about your concerns

Created by Clinical Psychologist Melissa Levi in partnership with Mable.

If your family is like most, you probably try to avoid having difficult conversations. It's normal to feel nervous or scared of upsetting Mum or Dad, especially at Christmas. You love them. You don't want to hurt their feelings or start a fight.

But raising your concerns gently is truly one of the kindest things you can do. It opens the door to the right medical help, care and support, helping Mum or Dad stay as healthy and independent as possible, for as long as possible.

You don't need to do this perfectly. It's simply about being calm, kind and clear. Easier said than done, which is why, together with Mable, we've created this guide to share some of the strategies and scripts that families just like yours have found helpful. Remember, you don't have to work this out on your own.

Four simple ways to have "the talk"

There's no single right way to have this conversation.

Each of the approaches I share blends warmth, clarity, and proven communication strategies. You don't need to memorise anything or use these scripts word for word. Simply read through, take what fits, and trust that you know your mum or dad best.

1 The “Gentle Noticer” approach

Best for parents who may be a bit more sensitive or defensive.

What to say:

> “Mum, I’ve noticed a few small things lately, like the fridge having some old food and you seeming more tired than usual. I know life gets busy and these things happen, but I wanted to check in. How have you been feeling?”
>
> You could then suggest visiting the GP together: “Mum, I’m not saying it’s anything serious, but I love you and want to make sure we’re looking after your health. How would you feel about seeing the GP for a check-in?”

Why it works: It opens the door gently and shows care, not criticism. You’re sharing what you’ve noticed, not what you’ve decided.

If they get defensive:

> “I get it. It must feel strange having your child come to you with these things. I promise I’m not trying to take over. I love you and just want to make sure you’re okay.”

2 The “Team Player” approach

Best for families who are more comfortable talking about and being involved in Mum or Dad’s healthcare.

What to say:

> “Dad, I know you’ve always said that you want to stay as healthy and independent as possible, and I’ve noticed a few small changes that made me wonder how things are going. Maybe we could check in with the GP together after the holidays, just to make sure we’re on top of things?”
>
> “I want to do everything I can to help you live the way you want to live, and to stay in control of everything. I don’t want to step on your toes, I just want to talk about what I can do to make life easier for you.”

Why it works: It keeps Mum or Dad’s own goals for their health, dignity and independence front and centre, while positioning you as a partner (not a boss).

If Dad says “I’m fine!”:

> “I really hope you are, and the best way to be sure is to check. Dad, you’ve got nothing to lose by seeing the doctor but a bit of time (and maybe money). That way we can both stop worrying and get on with the good stuff.”

3 The “Worried-but-Loving Child” approach

Best for parents who respond best to emotional honesty and warmth.

What to say:

> “Mum, can I tell you something? I’ve been feeling a bit worried. I’ve noticed you’ve been quieter and not quite yourself lately, and it’s been on my mind. I love you so much, and I just want to make sure you’re okay. Would you be open to seeing the GP in the new year, just to make sure there’s nothing small we can fix early?”

Why it works: It’s vulnerable, honest and human. Parents often respond to genuine emotion more than logic.

If Mum tears up or says “Don’t fuss over me”:

> “I know you don’t like being fussed over. In truth, this is just as much for my peace of mind as it is for you. I love you so much, and I’d feel better knowing that we’re doing everything we can to help you live the life you want.”

4 The “Practical Helper” approach

Best for parents who prefer concrete action over emotional talk.

What to say:

> “Dad, I’ve noticed a few small things lately, like the bills piling up and that dent on the car. Maybe after Christmas, I could book us a GP check-up just to tick everything off the list. You’ve always been so organised, I figured we could get ahead of things now, before they become bigger hassles later.”

Why it works: It appeals to logic and planning, framing help as a smart, proactive choice, not a loss of control.

If Dad says “No”:

> “Okay, that’s fine, there’s no great rush. Let’s both just keep an eye on things, and we can chat again at a later time and see how everything’s going.”

Quick phrases to keep in mind

When you're unsure what to say in the moment, these simple phrases help you stay calm and connected:

- "Dad, I'm asking because I care."
- "Mum, we can figure this out together."
- "Dad, I'm not saying anything's wrong, but I love you and want to make sure we check in on your health."
- "Mum, we don't have to sort everything out today. Let's just start the conversation."

After the conversation

However it goes, even if Mum or Dad brush off your concerns, you've done something seriously courageous and loving: You've planted a seed of awareness that often grows over time.

When you're ready to take that next step with your mum or dad:

- Use our **The next right step: Supporting Mum or Dad to see the GP** to help you get the most out of the GP visit.
- Keep notes of any ongoing changes.

And remember, whatever might come out of the GP visit, you don't need to walk this journey alone. Melissa Levi and Mable are here to support and guide you at every step.



Melissa Levi - Clinical Psychologist

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The next right step: Supporting Mum or Dad to see the GP.

Created by Clinical Psychologist Melissa Levi in partnership with Mable

You've noticed changes in Mum or Dad at Christmas, and have shared your concerns with them. Now, you might be feeling anxious about what comes next.

- How do I make sure that Mum actually sees her GP?
- What's the GP going to say?
- Is this doctor's visit going to open a door that I'm not ready to walk through?

Having walked this journey with more than 1,000 families just like yours (as well as with my own), I know this to be true: Whatever happens, seeing the GP now is one of the best investments you can make in your parents' health and your family's future.

The earlier you act, the more options you have for treatment, support, and planning. You'll gain time, choice, and peace of mind. And, most importantly, you'll help Mum or Dad stay as healthy and independent as possible, for as long as possible.

GP appointment guide

How to encourage Mum or Dad to see their doctor

You don't need to memorise these scripts or use them word for word. Simply read through, take what fits, and trust that you know your mum or dad best.

If they're open but nervous:

> "Mum, the doctor might help us understand and make sense of what's been going on, even if it's something simple, like medication or vitamin levels. I'd love to come with you, just to make sure we cover everything."

If they say "There's nothing wrong with me":

> "I really hope you're right. Seeing the GP will help us both stop worrying (you know me, I'm a worrywart) and make sure everything's okay. And, you're probably right. But, even so, it's always good to have a clear baseline of your health. That way, if anything ever changes down the track, we'll know what's normal for you."

If they say “Doctors can’t help” or “I don’t want bad news”:

> “Dad, I get it. It can be scary not knowing. It’s worth having a conversation with your GP before assuming it is bad news and that there is nothing you can do about it. You know, there’s been so much progress in medical treatments lately.”

If they flat-out refuse:

Stay calm. Don’t push. Try again in a few days, using gentle curiosity:

> “Dad, you mentioned feeling more tired last week. Would you be open to just a quick check-in with the GP? I’ll do the booking and come along.”

Or start smaller:

> “Why don’t we pop in for your annual check-up? It’s been a while.”

Preparing for the appointment

A few minutes of preparation make all the difference. It helps the GP see the full picture and ensures Mum or Dad gets the best possible care.

Bring:

- ◯ Your early warning signs checklist, with a few examples highlighted.
- ◯ A list of current medications (including supplements).
- ◯ Medical background: current conditions, recent illnesses or hospital visits.
- ◯ Any recent scans, blood test results, and specialist letters (the GP may already have copies of these).
- ◯ Glasses, hearing aids or mobility aids.
- ◯ Medicare card and concession cards, such as DVA or Seniors Card (if applicable).
- ◯ A support person (you) and your questions (see a list of suggested questions below).

What to say and ask in the appointment

Start gently:

> “We’ve noticed a few changes lately and wanted to check in to make sure everything’s okay.”

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Focus on what you’ve observed.

Helpful questions to ask:

- “Could these changes be related to memory or thinking problems?”
- “Are there other medical reasons that could be contributing, like medication side-effects, vitamin deficiencies, infection, etc.?”
- “Should we do any tests or referrals at this stage?”
- “Would a geriatrician or memory clinic be helpful?”
- “If there is something more serious going on, like dementia or another condition, what treatments or supports are available?”
- “What can we do now to help Mum/Dad stay well and safe at home?”
- “When should we follow up, and with whom?”

After the appointment

Take a breath. Whatever the outcome, you’ve taken one of the most important steps in helping your mum or dad to stay as healthy and independent as possible, for as long as possible, truly.

If the GP identifies an issue, remember: early clarity means more control.
If everything looks fine, you’ve gained peace of mind and a clear baseline to monitor over time.

Make sure you note down what was discussed and any next steps, then check in with Mum or Dad after a few weeks to see how things are going.

Now that you’ve got the medical side of things going, you might also want to think about having some more care and support for Mum or Dad at home. If you’re feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or confused about how to discuss and successfully introduce home care, take a look at our Mable and Melissa Levi guide on how to introduce home care successfully.



Melissa Levi - Clinical Psychologist

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How to have conversations about care

How to introduce home care successfully.

Created by Clinical Psychologist Melissa Levi in partnership with Mable.

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You've done so much already: you noticed the early warning signs at Christmas, shared your concerns with Mum or Dad, and have seen the GP.

Now, Mum or Dad needs a bit more help at home.

You might be thinking:

- How do I even bring this up?
- What if Mum gets angry?
- What if Dad feels as though I'm taking away his independence?

These worries are completely normal. Many parents hesitate or push back at first, not because they don't need help, but because they're scared of what help might mean: losing independence, autonomy, and control over their lives.

I've come to know, though, that introducing home care isn't about taking these things away. It's about giving Mum or Dad the support to keep living life on their own terms - to stay independent, safe, supported, and connected – in their own home for as long as possible.

And it gives you and your family peace of mind.

That's the real gift of home care.

And together, Melissa Levi and Mable will help you take this next step with confidence, clarity and calm.

Four ways to introduce home care successfully

1 The “Let’s Make Life Easier” approach

Best for parents who pride themselves on independence but are starting to feel the strain.

What to say:

> “Mum, I can see how much effort it takes to keep everything running at home. You do an amazing job, but it’s okay to share the load. What if we had someone come just once a week to help with a few things – the heavy lifting, the cleaning, the errands – so you can save your energy for the things you enjoy, like being with the grandkids?”
>
> “Dad, you’ve earned the right to put your feet up once in a while. How about we get someone in to do the boring stuff – the vacuuming, the laundry – and you keep the good jobs, like the crossword and going to lawn bowls?”

Why it works: It reframes care as an upgrade to independence, not a sign of decline.

If they resist:

> “It’s not about needing help. It’s simply about making life a little easier. Think of it as support, not surrender.”

2 The “Trial Run” approach

Best for parents who may be hesitant or sceptical of home care.

What to say:

> “Dad, I know you’re not sure about this idea, and that’s fair. What if we try it for two weeks? If you don’t like it, we’ll stop. No pressure.”

Then make it concrete:

> “Let’s just have someone come on Mondays to help with shopping and mowing the lawn – nothing more.”

Why it works: It gives Mum or Dad control and reduces fear of permanence.

Once they experience a kind, competent support worker, resistance often melts away.

Bonus tip: Start with an activity that Mum or Dad either values (e.g. gardening, organising the kitchen cupboards, etc.) or doesn't enjoy doing (e.g. laundry, vacuuming).

3 The "Your Doctor Recommended It" approach

Best for parents who respond well to authority or expertise.

What to say:

> "Dr [NAME] mentioned it could be helpful to have a bit of extra support at home – just small things to keep you well and independent. It's part of staying on top of your health."

Why it works: It removes family tension by shifting the idea from your suggestion to a professional recommendation.

Bonus Tip: Discuss the need for home care with Mum or Dad's GP, and have the GP raise it with Mum or Dad.

4 The "For Us, Not Just for You" approach

Best for families where Mum or Dad worry about burdening their kids.

What to say:

> "Mum, you know I love helping – but between work, the kids, and everything else, I sometimes worry I'm not keeping up. If we bring in a bit of help, it means we can spend more time just being together, not always doing chores."

Why it works: It shows home care is an act of love for the whole family.

Top tips for making home care work

1. Start small

Begin with one task that Mum or Dad would value help with (e.g. transport to medical appointments, grocery shopping, cleaning, gardening, errands, etc.) or one short social visit per week. Let Mum or Dad adjust slowly.

2. Keep them involved

Involve Mum or Dad in choosing their home care provider or support workers to build trust. Through Mable, Mum or Dad can view support worker profiles and interview the people they connect with.

3. Focus on fit, not just function

A warm personality match matters just as much as skill. The right person can feel more like a friendly neighbour than a “carer”.

4. Set clear routines

Agree on what days and activities work best, and keep consistency. Routine builds comfort and confidence.

5. Celebrate the wins

After a few visits, gently highlight what’s working:

> “Isn’t it nice to have the fridge stocked with delicious food again?”
>
> “I noticed you’ve had more energy this week! I’m so glad we made this change.”

Positive reinforcement helps Mum or Dad see the benefits.

What to do if Mum or Dad keeps saying “No”

Sometimes, even with your best efforts, resistance continues. Don’t lose hope. In my experience, this can change with time.

Try these gentle strategies:

1. Listen first

> “I get it. You’ve always done everything yourself, and having someone new in the house can feel strange. What part worries you most?”

Often, it’s about privacy, pride, or fear of losing control. Listening helps you target the real issue.

2. Use empathy and time

> “You’ve always been so independent. I’d probably feel the same way you do, right now. Let’s park it for now and revisit in a few weeks.”

People adjust more easily when they feel respected rather than pressured.

3. Reframe the role

> “Dad, it’s not a nurse or carer, think of it more like a helper, like when we used to have a cleaner. They’re there to make life easier, not to take over. You’re still very much the boss!”

4. Introduce gradually

Start with something neutral, such as gardening, driving, or meal preparation, rather than personal care (even if that’s where Mum or Dad really need help). Once trust is built, support can grow naturally.

A final word

Remember, introducing home care can feel messy, emotional, and uncomfortable at first. But every small step you take –every conversation, every trial run – is moving your family toward more independence, safety, and peace of mind.

You don't have to figure this all out alone.

With Melissa Levi, you'll have the knowledge, strategies, language, and steady support to guide your family through whatever comes next.

And with Mable, you can find trusted, flexible home support that fits Mum or Dad's life perfectly.

You've got this — and we've got you.



Melissa Levi - Clinical Psychologist

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