The holiday check in

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.



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