How to talk with an aging parent about their final wishes

You don't have to cover it all in one conversation. One question at a time is enough.

01 Choose a gentle moment.

Pick a quiet, unhurried time, not the middle of an argument, a hospital visit, or a family gathering. Ask permission first, and follow their lead.

> TRY SAYING
> *"Have you ever thought about what you'd want when you pass? I'd love to know, so we can get it right for you."*

02 Start with what feels like them, not paperwork.

Many people find it easier to begin with music, stories, or the kind of goodbye they'd want, and come to burial or cremation later.

> TRY SAYING
> *"If we were planning a gathering to celebrate you, what would make it feel like you?"*

03 Ask one question. Then listen.

The next pages follow the same questions as the Final Wishes and My After Party sections in After Party. Choose one or two that feel natural. There's no right order, and "I'm not sure yet" is a real answer.

04 If they aren't ready, leave the door open.

> TRY SAYING
> *"That's okay. We don't have to talk about it now. If you ever want to, I'm here to listen."*

Don't push. They may prefer to write their wishes down themselves, or talk with someone else they trust. Ask before you bring it up again.

05 Write it down together.

Thank them for sharing, and read back what you heard so you know you understood. Let them decide what to share, and with whom. Their answers can go straight into their Final Wishes and My After Party in After Party, so the people they choose can find them when the time comes.

PART ONE · MATCHES FINAL WISHES IN AFTER PARTY

Their final arrangements

Write their answers in their own words. Leave anything blank that they haven't decided.

PREFERRED ARRANGEMENTS

What is your preference for burial, cremation, or another arrangement?

- ☐ Burial
- ☐ Cremation
- ☐ Green burial
- ☐ Whole-body donation
- ☐ Another arrangement
- ☐ Not sure yet

Is there anything you'd like to explain about your choice?

Do you have wishes about organ, tissue, or whole-body donation?

RESTING PLACE

Do you have a resting place in mind?

If they served in the military: military honors, a flag, or a national or veterans cemetery?

If you choose cremation, what would you like to happen to your ashes?

Would you like a memorial marker or inscription?

CARE AND PERSONAL DETAILS

Do you have a preference about a viewing or visitation?

A private goodbye, an open or closed casket, or no viewing at all.

Are there clothing, appearance, or personal-item wishes you'd like followed?

Do you have preferences for a casket, urn, or another container?

Are there faith, cultural, or personal traditions you'd like respected?

ARRANGEMENTS ALREADY MADE

Do you have a preferred funeral home or provider?

Is anything already arranged or paid for? Where is the paperwork?

Do you have a spending limit or cost preferences?

BOUNDARIES

Is there anything you definitely do not want?

If your first choice isn't possible, what would you prefer instead?

What is still undecided?

ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT THEIR ARRANGEMENTS

PART TWO · MATCHES MY AFTER PARTY IN AFTER PARTY

How they'd like to be celebrated

The gathering, the people, and the little things that would make it feel like them.

THE GATHERING

What kind of gathering would you like? Choose as many as feel right.

- ☐ Private family goodbye
- ☐ Traditional funeral
- ☐ Celebration of life
- ☐ Viewing or visitation
- ☐ Memorial service
- ☐ Home gathering
- ☐ Wake or vigil
- ☐ Graveside service
- ☐ Virtual or hybrid

How would you like it to feel?

What matters most to you?

Do you have a place in mind?

What would you like people to wear?

THE PEOPLE

Who would you like to lead or host the gathering?

Who would you like to speak, read, perform, or take another special role?

Who should hear privately before anything is announced publicly?

What would you like shared in an obituary or announcement, and what should stay private?

MUSIC, WORDS, AND TRADITIONS

What music or songs would you like included?

Are there readings, prayers, poems, or other words you'd like included?

Are there traditions, rituals, or moments you want to make room for?

Would you like guests to share their own memories?

THE DETAILS

Which photographs, meaningful objects, or keepsakes would you like displayed?

Would you prefer flowers, donations, both, or neither? Is there a charity or cause?

Would you like a reception or time together afterward? What food or drinks would you love?

ANYTHING ELSE

If your first choices aren't possible, what would you want your people to prioritize?

Is there anything else you want them to know?

WHAT I HEARD

Read it back to them so you know you understood.

OUR NEXT STEP

A time to talk again, a question for next time, or adding their wishes to After Party.

After Party is a planning tool. It does not provide legal, financial, or medical advice, and these notes do not replace a will or other legal documents. Some states let a person sign a separate form naming who has the final say over their arrangements. If your parent has one, note who it names and where it's kept.