



before & beside

Family Conversation Starter Guide

*Gentle words for one of the most important
conversations you'll have with someone you love.*

“Your family should never have to guess.”

A free guide from Before & Beside, nurse-guided family healthcare planning.



Welcome

If you're reading this, you're probably thinking about a conversation you've been putting off. It's the one where you ask someone you love what they'd want if their health ever took a serious turn. That's a hard conversation to start. It's also one of the kindest things you can do for each other.

This guide won't make the conversation easy. But it can make it a little gentler, a little clearer, and a lot less lonely. Inside, you'll find simple ways to open the topic, real questions to ask, and a few reminders for taking care of yourself while you take care of this.

As a nurse, and someone who lost my own sister far too soon, I've sat with families in the exact moment this guide is meant to help you avoid: the moment where no one knows what their loved one would have wanted. That's the whole reason Before & Beside exists, so your family never has to guess.

Erica, RN

Founder, Before & Beside

Before You Start

Pick a calm moment. A quiet evening or a slow Sunday works better than the car, a holiday, or right after a hard diagnosis.

Come with curiosity, not an agenda. You're there to listen and understand, not to convince anyone of anything.

It's okay to pause. This doesn't need to happen in one sitting. A conversation you return to is still a conversation that worked.

Let them lead the pace. Some people want to talk it all through at once. Others need to circle back to it over weeks. Both are fine.

You don't need every answer today. Even one honest answer is progress you didn't have yesterday.



Gentle Ways to Open the Conversation

You don't need a perfect opening line. These are here so you're not starting from nothing.

Opening the Topic

"I've been thinking about our family, and I want to make sure we're never guessing about what matters to you. Can we talk for a bit?"

"A friend of mine went through something hard with their parent's health, and it made me want to ask: have you ever thought about what you'd want in a medical emergency?"

"This isn't about anything being wrong right now. I just want to understand your wishes so I can honor them if I'm ever the one making decisions."

Understanding Their Wishes

If you couldn't speak for yourself, what would matter most to you: comfort, time, independence, or something else?

Is there a difference between how you'd want to be treated for a short-term illness versus a serious, long-term one?

Would you rather be cared for at home, or are you comfortable with a hospital or facility if that's what's needed?

Are there specific treatments you'd want to avoid, or ones you'd always want tried?

Who Should Speak for You

If you couldn't make your own medical decisions, who do you trust to make them for you?

Have you talked to that person yet, or would it help if we did it together?

Is there anyone you'd specifically not want involved in those decisions?

What Matters Most

What does a "good day" look like for you right now?

Is there anything you're afraid of when you picture being seriously ill?

What would you want the people around you to know, even if they never had to act on it?



What To Do With This Conversation

However far you got, write down what you learned while it's fresh. Even a few notes in your phone count. The goal isn't a perfect document today. It's making sure what you just heard doesn't get lost.

When you're ready to turn this conversation into something organized and shareable with the rest of your family, that's exactly what Before & Beside is built for.

Ready for the next step?

The Complete Before & Beside Package turns conversations like this one into organized healthcare proxy worksheets, advance directive guidance, and an emergency sheet, delivered to your email, ready to print and share.

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