FOR FAMILIES

How do I talk to my parent about falls without a fight?

By Russ L'HommeDieu, DPT, ATP, CFPS · Doctor of Physical Therapy, RESNA Assistive Technology Professional, Certified Fall Prevention Specialist · November 2, 2026



Start with what your parent wants, not with what scares you. Talk about staying independent and doing the things they love, rather than about "falls." Use the word "concern" instead of "fear," offer choices instead of orders, and expect this to be several conversations, not one.

Why the conversation is hard

For many older adults, a talk about falls sounds like a talk about losing their home, their car or their say in their own life. That is why people hide falls. Fewer than half of people who fall tell their doctor.

The stakes on the other side are real, too. When worry about falling grows, people often cut back on activity, get weaker and fall more. Keeping your parent active and confident is part of keeping them safe. We explore this balance in The Quiet Negotiation: Safety, Independence, and Compassion.

Lead with their goals

Ask before you advise. Try questions like:

- "What do you most want to keep doing at home?"
- "What would make the next few years feel good to you?"
- "Is anything getting harder than it used to be?"

Fall prevention guidelines call for building a person's own goals, values and preferences into the plan. If your parent wants to keep gardening, driving to church or hosting the grandkids, that becomes the reason for every change.

Choose your words carefully

- **Say "concern," not "fear."** The World Falls Guidelines recommend it, because "concern" is less intense and emotional and easier to admit to, and the older adults consulted for the guidelines preferred it.
- **Say "average risk," not "no risk."** It is honest and less alarming.
- **Talk about "staying steady" or "staying independent."** For many people that lands better than "falls."
- **Avoid "you always" and "you never."** Describe what you saw instead: "I noticed you held the wall in the hallway."

Some phrases therapists use:

- "Even elite athletes train balance and reaction."
- "A little each day builds strength and helps you rely less on others."

Push back gently on "old people fall"

Many people believe falling is just part of getting older. It is not. Most falls come from several causes acting together, and many of those causes can be treated: weak legs, balance problems, vision changes, dizziness and certain medicines. Our article Is it normal to fall as you get older? explains this in plain language.

Offer choices, not orders

People accept change more easily when they choose it. Instead of "You need grab bars," try "Would you rather have a grab bar by the toilet or a shower chair first?" Let your parent decide the order. Small wins build confidence, and confidence makes the next step easier.

People also move through stages: from "nothing can be done," to thinking about it, to planning, to acting, and finally to keeping the new habit. If your parent is not ready, plant the seed and come back to it.

Let someone else carry part of the message

Sometimes advice lands better from a professional than from a son or daughter.

- **The doctor.** Most older adults will consider a medication change when their prescriber explains it. Offer to go to the next appointment and help make a list of questions.
- **A physical therapist.** Exercise that challenges balance is the most effective way to prevent falls.
- **A home safety professional.** A neutral visitor can point out a loose rail without it feeling like a family argument.

Never suggest that your parent stop or change a medicine on their own.

Be careful with cameras and gadgets

Technology can help, but only with your parent's agreement. No cameras in bathrooms, clear consent for any drop-in video calling, and the ability to turn monitoring off. Technology supplements, and never replaces, a person who checks in. See Video Cameras for Mom & Dad.

If the talk goes badly

Stop. Say, "I love you, and I am not trying to take anything away." Try again another day. Your parent's dignity and freedom matter as much as their safety, a theme we write about in The Fight For Freedom.

How Home Safety Solutions can help

A home safety visit starts with the person: their routines, their goals and what they want to keep doing. Recommendations are ranked and explained so your parent can choose what to do first. Learn what happens during a home safety visit. Call (813) 365-9171 or email info@homesafety.solutions.

Related reading: The Quiet Negotiation · The Fight For Freedom · Five ways your home can help a parent stay independent · CDC caregiver brochure (PDF)

This article is general education, not medical advice. Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or therapist about your own situation.

Want a plan for your own home?
Every service starts with an Initial Consultation, a 30-minute phone call with Dr. L'HommeDieu.
Book at homesafety.solutions