How to talk to your parents about their affairs (and what to write down)

Key facts

- The National Institute on Aging says to "review your plans at least once each year and when any major life event occurs" (National Institute on Aging, checked 2026-09-17).
- Legal documents like a durable power of attorney "must be completed while you are competent to know what you are signing" (Family Caregiver Alliance, checked 2026-09-17).
- Elder law attorney Harry Margolis suggests this opener: "Say that you don't even have to see the will but you just want to make sure that they have one" (AARP, published May 19, 2026, checked 2026-09-17).
- AARP advises starting sentences with "I am concerned about" rather than "You need to," which "puts people on the defensive" (AARP, checked 2026-09-17).
- Adults 60 and older reported about $2.4 billion in fraud losses to the FTC in 2024, up from about $600 million in 2020 (Federal Trade Commission, checked 2026-09-17).

Aging parents documents checklist

The child writes down locations and names. Passwords, PINs and safe combinations stay with the parent, or in a password manager with emergency access. The list follows the National Institute on Aging's checklist, which says to keep "important papers and copies of legal documents in one place" (National Institute on Aging, checked 2026-09-17).

Legal

- Will: where the signed original is, and which attorney drafted it
- Living trust, if any: trustee name and where the document is
- Durable power of attorney for finances: who is named, where the original is
- Health care proxy and living will or advance directive: who is named, whether the doctor has a copy

Personal and health

- Where the birth, marriage, divorce, citizenship and military records are
- Names and numbers of close friends, clergy, doctors, lawyers and advisors
- Current prescriptions, the pharmacy, health insurance and Medicare cards

Financial

- Banks and credit unions by name, and which account pays the bills
- Retirement accounts, pensions and Social Security: where the income comes from

- Investment accounts and the broker's name
- Insurance (life, long-term care, home, auto): agent names and where the policies are
- Mortgage, property tax and other debts: what is owed, to whom, when
- Deed to the home, car titles, safe deposit box and key: where they are

Digital

- The main email, and whether a legacy contact or inactive account plan is set
- Which password manager, and who is its emergency contact
- Where the phone passcode is kept, sealed
- Subscriptions and auto-pays that would need canceling

Our digital legacy checklist walks through each account type and the built-in legacy tools.
