

## **“OH MY GOD! WE’RE PARENTING OUR PARENTS”**

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### **Book Excerpt**

#### **HOW TO UNDO OR REDO OUR PARENTS’ “IMPORTANT” DOCUMENTS**

Start your conversations with your parents by making sure they can hear you, literally. If they wear hearing aids, get your parents to put them in, even if they are resistant or grouchy about it. It is important that you be heard and understood. You need to explain the Parenting Our Parents (POP) ideas you are suggesting slowly, patiently and clearly.

You will also need to speak so they can hear you. Be aware that sometimes a loud voice may sound to the elderly ear like you’re angry with them. Having to repeat yourself may also cause you to feel frustrated and hence sound angry. Therefore you will want to practice raising your volume and lowering your emotional tone. Invite your parents to ask their questions and even if they repeat the same question many times, find the part of you that is most patient. Have that kind part of you answer your parents.

You may be feeling overwhelmed by the whole of this POP task as I certainly did. I recommend you break it all down into manageable pieces. If you begin early enough in the POPcycle, you and your parents will be able to incorporate any desirable changes incrementally and that will likely evoke less resistance. Start by looking at how making even one small modification could make them less vulnerable and even improve the quality of your parents’ lives.

For example, if your parents are leery of anything electronic, suggest they set up a direct deposit of their Social Security checks into their bank account. At first the notion of electronic depositing may seem foreign or “too tech-y” for them. Talk with your parents about how doing this one small thing will help them. Once your parents “accept” your first good POP idea, they’ll learn that your suggested changes are often advantageous to them. Then they’ll be more willing to allow you more POP changes. Your success *will* build on itself.

Let your parents know they can skip that special trip they now make to the bank each month. Given the U. S. residential mail delivery, their Social Security benefits are likely to be in their bank account faster and more dependably by direct deposit than by their manual deposit. For your parents, getting down to the bank each month may involve arduously walking to the bus stop, getting up and down those bank steps. Then there’s avoiding exposing themselves to the elements during flu season. Direct deposit will also eliminate your parents’ waiting in the cold for the bus in either or both directions. In all, just putting their money in the bank can be a daunting monthly event, particularly challenging during the winter months.

To help your folks better understand your points about the value of direct deposit, you might remind them of a family incident that will reinforce it. For example, have your parents recall the time last winter when they’d both had

colds and couldn't get out to the bank on time. Since they'd already mailed their payment to the Water and Power Company, their utility check had bounced. Luckily, you'd seen that pink bill on their desk and called immediately or else your parents would have lost their heat and electricity, suffering far worse respiratory consequences than their colds.

In the subtle dynamics of POParenting, sometimes using just the right word can make your POP idea far more appealing to them. Take the time to talk with your parents so they understand. That will make it easier for them to feel more secure. When you're having these conversations with your Mom and Dad, avoid using the actual word "change," a term that subliminally suggests they've done things incorrectly up until now. Try using the word "expand." It suggests newness without their having to give up the past or feel badly about it.

After you've clearly and patiently explained things, your Mom and Dad may be willing to try direct depositing. Then perhaps later on, they'll accept something else "new" as well. Although it's possible to do this step online, you may also make their signing up for direct deposit a bit of a family "outing," some time to spend with you. Your parents may wish to be able to talk with their banker and feel more in charge of their direct depositing. If so, pick a nice sunny day, when they're feeling alert and healthy, if that's possible. Accompany your parents to their bank, credit union or savings and loan to set up the direct deposit and, perhaps, take them out for lunch afterwards to "celebrate." If they are unable to get to the bank, you can always set this up this online or by mail.

All too often your parents may be hesitant to ask you for help and they may even refuse it, when offered. Some are fearful, like my Mom, that you will come in, alter their world and they will "lose control." Aging people often have become very set in their ways and are not comfortable with things that are unfamiliar. Most of your parents will be grateful for anything you do that relieves them of feeling stressed. It's optimal to "under-react" when you discover your parents' small mishaps, like their undeposited Social Security check or their "minor" falls and you'll also want to remain calm when dealing with them throughout any longer-termed consequences.

You'll need to stay alert to discover what, when and how to make suggestions to your parents. "Slow and steady" is often a good approach here as elsewhere when you're POParenting. "Slow," since your parents tend to do things at a more deliberative speed than you do and they need time to feel comfortable with your new role and your suggested changes. "Steady" since you'll need to be thorough and patient, especially if you've seen a number of things they did before you started helping that you believe need "fixing."

Therefore, in choosing where to make your next POP suggestion for their "expansion," look at what you've already been able to successfully alter with your folks and then learn how to leverage those to update and improve more things for your elderly parents in the future.