

## THE TOUGHEST CONVERSATION: Retiring the Car Keys

**It is probably one of the toughest conversations you'll ever have: you would rather talk about finances and death with your parents than ask them to retire the car keys.**

**Why is it so hard?** Americans prize self-sufficiency. Driving is deeply connected to our sense of independence, freedom. On the practical side: without a car, your parents will have trouble getting places. Opportunities to socialize will be tricky too.

Though an emotionally-charged topic, it's counterproductive to postpone tough conversations. Keep in mind, it's more important to avoid accidents or death than to avoid talking about unpleasant and difficult topics.

### Signs of risky driving include:

- Confusion or getting lost in familiar places
- Failure to stop at a red light or stop sign
- Bad judgment making left hand turns
- Some studies have found an association between falling and driving problems
- Difficulty maintaining lane position
- Scrapes or dents on the car, mailbox or garage
- Citations for driving

Age-related changes in mental processing speed, vision, hearing and physical function may also cause difficulty. Those at highest risk appear to be over the age of 80 – but many octogenarians have no trouble.

What can you do? Our best advice is to have that first conversation about driving safety with your parent before it becomes a problem. This can help establish an open dialogue and give your parent time to evaluate his or her own skills and find acceptable solutions before a crisis.

If you missed that opportunity, and to increase the chance of a successful conversation after you notice problems, AARP and the Hartford Insurance Group suggest selecting a person the older driver trusts, such as a spouse, physician, adult child or close friend, to initiate the discussion.

Easing the transition. Making the transition from driver to passenger is a big step. Giving up driving privileges brings up lots of questions, fears and challenges. An Aging Wisdom Care Manager can be a valuable asset to families struggling with this difficult conversation. We can help evaluate the situation, and when necessary,

- Facilitate important family meetings to open the discussion
- Be a sounding board and problem solver if a risky driver balks at the idea of retiring the keys
- Explain how to utilize formal driving evaluation programs and state licensing reexamination procedures
- Clarify options for services, transportation and supportive housing to prevent isolation and help alleviate those nagging feelings of dependency

Putting the brakes on driving is a real challenge, but with Aging Wisdom's help, the transition can be much smoother.

**Are any of these signs familiar?** Not sure what to do next? Contact **Aging Wisdom** and one of our Aging Life Care Professionals™ can provide expert consultation and care management. With an objective perspective on the situation, we facilitate difficult family discussions and decision-making to address these and other concerns. Call **206.456.5155, ext. 1**, or email us at [jgray@agingwisdom.com](mailto:jgray@agingwisdom.com)