

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**