

To Drive Or Not To Drive, That Is The Question

"With Mom's poor eyesight and bad heart, why on earth would you think its safe for her to still be driving? Not to mention age?" Angie angrily asked her brother Jim.

"First off, Sis, our very independent mother only drives to the store. during daylight. Her health isn't that bad AND I don't live close enough to help her. Do you want to take on that responsibility with her. or from her? I vote she still gets to drive for now."

Similar scenes are being played out as families, communities and states struggle with the problem of senior drivers. It all boils down to Safety vs. Freedom. The tipping point for this concern came last year when an older man in Los Angeles had a blackout while driving and plowed his car into a sidewalk, killing several people. Since then lawmakers all over the country have been trying to come up with stricter driving laws for older adults. The problem is complex and controversial.

Restrictions based on age alone seem unfair, since the accident rate is highest for drivers 25 and under. The ability of the driver should be the determining factor with special screenings as drivers grow older. That sounds reasonable, but the difficult part is getting folks who have driven all their lives to give up that freedom to drive. Older adults can be very touchy when their driving abilities are questioned. Especially when their declining abilities are due to a physical condition.

Approaching this subject gradually, over time, is an important step in gaining acceptance from your parents. More-than-likely, its not a good plan to barrage parents with facts, figures and reasons why they should stop driving, if they are not listening to you to begin with. Shorter, repeated attempts at convincing will likely serve you better than attempting to discuss such a sensitive subject in one, single discussion. There's no specific approach one can take to convince an aging parent to give up driving because every situation is different, but here are some suggestions.

Remember that your parent has likely gone through multiple losses in their life. As we age, these losses intensify and come at us more quickly and sometimes unexpectedly. Even if your parent is not using the car frequently, it still represents yet another very real loss and yet another very real inconvenience.

1. Talk to your parent about the harm they can do to others.
2. Talk to your parent about the harm they can do to themselves.
3. Let your parent know that you prefer that they not drive (and don't be wishy washy about it!)
4. Ask your parent's doctor to assess those areas of your parent's health that affect driving ability.
5. Persuade a family friend to intervene about parent's driving.
6. Talk to your parent about helping them run errands.
7. Offer alternative transportation, such as a bus pass.
8. Confirm your empathy for losing the convenience of driving.
9. Show the financial increase of auto insurance because of age.
10. Let your parent know how worried you are about his driving.
11. Suggest selling the car so your parent can have extra money.
12. Tell your parent how proud you are that she has chosen to stop driving.
13. Get the whole family together and point out valid reasons why your parent should not drive. (Siblings sending mixed messages can just cause delays; everybody has to be on the same page!)
14. Hire an intervention counselor if family members can't agree on whether your parent should drive.
15. Help your parent understand how to call for a taxi and to feel safe about the process. Consider going through the process and going for a "test drive" with a taxi driver.
16. Make giving up driving your parent's idea if possible.
17. State that grandchildren will no longer be allowed to drive with grandparent, or suggest that they no longer have other passengers in the car with them.
18. List all the advantages of never having to drive again.
19. Repeat positively that by not driving, your parent is protecting his own safety and the safety of others.