



# When Is The Right Time To Give Up The Car?

Remind your parent that you are on their side and ask how you can work together to address concerns

Families get all tied up in knots over this question. There can be real fears about whether or not Mom or Dad is still safe to drive, but nobody wants to even discuss having to take the car keys. The car often serves as a link to friends and emotional well-being, and it symbolizes independence and the freedom to make one's own choices. Start the conversation with your mother or father by talking about driving and what it means.

*The best way to take the guesswork out of the situation is to ask for an independent assessment. Most areas have programs that offer testing and defensive driving courses to seniors. AARP offers a driver safety course.*

Difficulties with driving, citations and police encounters, and fender-bender accidents can be the precipitating events that make you take a close look at aging parents' abilities.

If possible, you will want to ride with your parents to be able to experience their driving firsthand. Ride with them often enough so that it's not seen as out of the ordinary, and so you can see how they do over time. Signs of problems include:

- A series of accidents or close calls
- Erratic driving, or if your parent is easily surprised by other drivers or appears nervous while driving

- Driving too slowly or too fast for conditions
- Vision issues such as trouble seeing pedestrians, objects and other vehicles; usually more of an issue at night
- Difficulty coordinating the hand and foot movements necessary for smooth driving
- Quickly feeling tired or exhausted from driving
- Medications that can interfere with concentration or other abilities needed when driving
- Difficulties remembering a destination or getting back home

The best way to take the guesswork out of the situation is to ask for an independent assessment. Most areas have programs that offer testing and defensive driving courses to seniors. AARP offers a driver safety course ([http://www.aarp.org/families/driver\\_safety/](http://www.aarp.org/families/driver_safety/)) and testing in a classroom setting. In most states, the Department of Motor Vehicles or the Department of Public Safety will also contact seniors if a request is made. An inspector will interview the driver and may require a medical check-up or a behind-the-wheel test.

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Hopefully you can have a conversation about safe driving with your parent. But, if necessary, those types of requests can be made and kept confidential. The insurance carrier or agent can also ask for a review.

Questions about health issues can be another non-threatening way to approach the problem. A physician can check for eyesight, hearing or other conditions that could interfere with driving ability. He or she can also request a driving assessment through a recommended program or the state. You might ask your parent to agree not to drive without first getting the doctor's permission.

Remind your parent you are on their side and ask how you can work together to address concerns. It can be helpful to stress the welfare of others on the road, as well as their own safety. Sometimes certain accommodations can be realistic and safe compromises.

- Start with no night driving
- Agree to keeping to certain familiar routes
- Limit driving to a certain radius of home during specific times of day
- Avoid rush hour traffic and busy intersections
- Keep to surface streets and off highways

**Know that your parents may put up barriers, so be ready.**

- Research transportation alternatives in the community- public transportation (some have door-to-door service), van services, local charities and taxi cabs
- Offer to help with a cost analysis. Look at how many miles are driven on the car a year versus how much it costs to operate, insure, store and maintain the car over that period of time. Is it worth the expense? How do those costs compare with alternatives?
- Propose that your parent stop driving temporarily, but keeps his or her car and license, while giving it a one-month test to see how they fare.

Understand that this is one of the most difficult conversations adult children have with their parents. And legally, your options may be limited if you just can't talk about these issues. Most older drivers do decide for themselves when they need to cut back or stop driving. But, if you believe your parent is a danger to themselves and others, SEEK PROFESSIONALS to help you. Let them be the ones to have these conversations or take away the keys. Look to a:

- Physician
- Visiting or parish nurse
- Pastor
- Trusted friend
- Insurance agent
- Health care or resident administrator (if you parents live in a senior or assisted living community)
- Police officer (yes, do call the cops if all else fails!)

These individuals can say, "Here's what we know or what has been reported. We are seeing some changes." They can approach the situation in a way you just cannot.

In some situations, families have taken the keys, dismantled the car battery or had car locks changed. These are not very respectful solutions and should only be a means of last resort if, for example, your parent is still driving after their license has been revoked.

Conversations of this type are always difficult to contemplate, much less have. And, as we have noted, this is one of the toughest. Consider reviewing our article on "How To Best Get Started" to get off on the right foot.