



Top Tips for Discussing When it's Time to Stop Driving

As someone you care for ages, you may become worried about his or her ability to continue to drive safely. Some people can drive competently well into their 80s and even beyond, while other people may have difficulties in their 60s or even younger.

When you're responsible for an older adult's overall safety, you may wonder when it's appropriate to start talking about safety behind the wheel.

Your first step in this process is to observe the older adult while driving.

The following situations can indicate possible driving problems:

- Getting lost, even when driving short, familiar routes
- Failing to obey traffic signs or signals
- Cutting off other drivers, straddling lanes, or making wide turns
- Reacting slowly to emergencies
- Falling asleep behind the wheel or appearing inattentive
- Becoming easily angered or agitated
- Using poor judgment, such as not yielding right-of-way
- Forgetting to use mirrors or turn signals or to check for blind spots
- Having trouble judging distances

It's important not to comment on or to criticize the older driver's behavior during the drive. Instead, have a chat about any issues after you're both out of the car. Calmly state any unsafe actions, without sounding judgmental or angry. Be sure to be specific.

If you see that the older driver had problems like the ones mentioned above, consider these steps:

Schedule a check-up.

A healthcare professional can evaluate whether the older adult is physically able to drive safely. The provider can also advise you if any medications the older adult is taking could affect his or her ability to drive safely.

Get a vision test.

An eye care professional, such as an optometrist or an ophthalmologist, should test the older driver's vision to make sure they are visually able to drive safely.

Have a professional evaluate the older adult's driving skills.

There are professionals who specialize in evaluating whether older adults can drive safely. A driving rehabilitation specialist (DRS) is a professional who has the skills to evaluate an individual's overall ability to operate a vehicle safely. Based on the individual's performance the DRS will develop a plan, make recommendations about strategies, equipment, and provide training to improve a person's driving safety and overall health and well-being. However, there are not many DRS's in the United States. If you do not have access to a DRS in your area, an occupational therapist may also be able to evaluate many driving-related limitations. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and ADED: The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists are organizations that can assist you in finding a professional.

Know when to have the conversation.

Ask yourself: Do you feel comfortable letting the older adult drive you somewhere? The answer may be a signal that it is time to start the conversation.

Enlist support.

Talk to others in the older driver's circle. Ask them if they share your concerns about the older adult's ability to drive safely. Rehearse the discussion with them so you can be calm and caring. Depending on the circumstances, you may even ask one or more of them to participate in the driving conversation with the older adult.

Make the conversation compassionate.

You don't want the older adult to feel like "everyone is ganging up on them," so make certain to frame the conversation in a supportive, concerned way. Don't let your own anxiety or fear about addressing driving skills lead you to sound angry.

Discuss specifics, but avoid blame.

Explain to the older adult why you're worried about his or her driving. Cite examples: "Dad, you went through a stop sign last time we drove together. And you forgot to use your turn signals." Or, "Mom, you got lost on the way to the supermarket."

Be prepared for resistance and even anger.

Driving represents independence to many older adults. When they think you might be taking away their ability to get around, they may become defensive, even irate.

Schedule time for another talk.

If the older adult resists what you're saying or gets agitated, gently end the conversation. Let them take in what you've said, then revisit the topic a day or two later.

Ask for the older adult's opinion.

Make sure to take the time to hear what the older person thinks about his or her driving ability and honest feeling of security behind the wheel. It's very possible that if you've noticed problems, he or she may have, too, and may feel vulnerable.

Appeal to the older driver's sense of responsibility.

If the medical professionals and the driving specialist you consulted agree that it's time for the older adult to stop driving, appeal to his or her sense of responsibility. Remind the older driver that driving poses a risk not only to self but also to others, who could potentially be injured – or worse – in case of a crash. Older drivers might want to think about how they would feel if they were to cause an injury.