

HELPING

your parents stay mobile



Having a drivers licence is a critical part of being independent and giving up driving is a major change to lifestyle. When thinking about raising the issue of limiting or stopping driving with your parents, give careful thought about how and when you will discuss the issue with them. No one at any age likes to be told they are a poor or dangerous driver.

It's best to hold discussions about driving plans before a crisis or crash occurs. This situation may force a driving discussion to take place and may focus on ways to take away the car keys rather than on safer driving behaviour or strategies that help avert problems with on-road safety.

Here are some tips you may want to consider:

Be sensitive. Prior to talking to an older driver about limiting or stopping driving, give careful thought about how and when you will discuss the issue with them. No one at any age likes to be told they are a dangerous driver. Most drivers, including older drivers, consider themselves relatively safe behind the wheel. Avoid taking a critical tone or making them feel attacked. Express positive and supportive feelings for them.

Hold discussions. Talk about driving plans before a crisis. Few discussions take place about driving behaviour itself or strategies that help avert problems with on-road safety. A crisis may force a driving discussion to take place and may focus on ways to take away the car keys.

Encourage planning for the future. For many people, financial planning is central to retirement planning. Encourage your parents to develop a transportation plan in combination with their financial plan.

Accentuate the positive. While you may find instances in which your parent is not driving safely, focus on what they're doing well – that they have little trouble making simple trips around a town during the day. Avoiding driving in some situations may be easier to face than stopping completely.

Include parents in all discussions. Your parents need to feel in control of their lives and feel that you respect their abilities as a driver. The motivation for change must come from them, both for their own safety and for your relationship.

Some families have found that bringing up the topic indirectly, such as, "I heard Bill gave up driving. Do you think your driving ability has changed?" is a better way to initiate discussions without being confrontational. Ideas you have for keeping them on the road rather than suggesting that they give up driving will always be better received.

Remember to always provide reinforcement to correct shortcomings and overcome fears. Try to be understanding if your parent resists change. Just talking about the issue can help you gradually work toward better answers. Think about how you'd like someone to address driving with you some day. It is important that you consider ways the driver can remain engaged in all their usual activities if they give up the car keys.

Assessing real abilities. Does your own driving style make you see slower drivers who stick to the speed limit as “unfit”? Do you accept the stereotypes about aging? Do you lump all older people together as a group? You need to assess actual ability based on facts and not on your own bias or on stereotypes.

Try to get an objective idea of your parent's driving abilities. Recent accidents or traffic fines could signal a problem. Try to drive with your parent(s). This will give you information so you can be specific when you discuss their driving. **Base your judgment about their driving ability, on facts, not age.**

Watch for warning signs. Are you observing these behaviours :

Changing lanes without signalling	Performing jerky stops or starts	Going through stop signs or red lights
Reacting slowly	Going too fast or too slow for safety	Straying into other lanes
Problems seeing road signs or traffic signals	Bumping or scraping the car on fences or garage doors	Problems making turns at intersections, especially right turns

Help parents assess their current driving skills and address problems the assessment uncovers. If your parents are agreeable, you can help them assess their current driving skills by checking with the an occupational therapist, doctor or accredited driving instructor. You can then address any problems the assessment may uncover. Driver refresher education is provided by some driving schools, NRMA Safer Driving School has ‘Refresher’ lessons for people of all ages.

Address problems the assessment uncovers. For example, if reaction time is slowing, a driver can learn to allow more space between his or her car and the one in front. He or she can also avoid driving during peak traffic times or in crowded areas. Driver refresher courses or even behind-the-wheel driver education courses are other options they may like to consider.

Recommend a driving instruction "tune up." - NRMA Safer Driving School has ‘Refresher’ lessons for people of all ages. Our refresher lessons can help sharpen driving skills and provide feedback after an independent observation of driving skills. Many senior drivers have found this useful, particularly if they are approaching the stage where they may need to have their license renewed.

The link is: www.mynrma.com.au/saferdriving

For further information on availability, pricing and for bookings please call **1300 696 762** in New South Wales and the ACT.

Transport options. The car provides a simple transport option for us all – you check the fuel and if needed the street directory and then you drive to your destination. For older people who stop driving, it will be more difficult – transport alternatives will need to be found that allow them to engage in their usual routines such as social activities and medical appointments. You may need to help identify available transportation alternatives in your area.

Family and friends. Family and friends are a good alternative to driving for older adults. This is an easy and inexpensive way to travel, and allows you to spend time together.

Community transport. Services such as adult day centres, housing programs, may offer transportation for program participants or customers.

Taxi/Car Service. These private services offer flexible scheduling and charge a fee. Many older adults may perceive these services as “expensive” or “a luxury” but they generally cost much less than owning and maintaining a car. There may also be discounts available for seniors.

Help parents find other means of transportation so they can learn how to get around without a car. Work with your parents to identify what public, private, and community transportation services are available. These may include buses, taxis, private drivers for hire, seniors transportation services, and volunteer driver services.

Consider these approaches:

- Brainstorm together how your parents might get rides and pitch in yourself when possible.
 - Investigate what's available in their community. Talk to your parent(s) about what they might do for someone else in exchange for transportation.
 - Find out about any discount or reduced rate programs for older adults.
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Involve others if driving is dangerous. If your parents refuse to make changes or stop driving, find a doctor or family friend to help. As a last resort, you can contact the RTA and report unsafe driving. The RTA suggests that rather than accusing someone of driving unsafely, talk to them openly and tell them that there are other options available to them. Some older drivers know when to stop driving. Others will listen to the advice of family and friends.

However in some cases, the best alternative may be to inform the RTA if you are concerned that an older person is no longer driving safely. You should speak to the person before deciding to contact a Motor Registry. You can ask for and complete an ‘Unsafe Driving Report’ providing the driver’s name, date of birth, current address and licence number if known.

You will also be required to provide your name and address, which the RTA will take all possible steps to keep confidential, except in accordance with relevant privacy legislation and court requirements. The RTA will then contact the driver and may ask them to have a medical examination and/or a driving test.