

Guidance notes for the Friends and family of older drivers

“The sound of an engine revving in a car park is hardly unusual, but the driver – my 86-year-old father – was quietly dozing and oblivious to the fact that his foot was resting on the accelerator.

With the bodywork of his Ford Fiesta displaying the scars bequeathed by telegraph poles and gateposts, the signs were too obvious to ignore. It provided a stark reminder that the time had come to talk about relinquishing his driving licence.

My father was never quite the same following a couple of minor strokes, but after more than half a century of careful driving, it was still going to be difficult to break the convenient habit of getting behind the wheel. Driving as though it were still the 1950s, he used his indicators less and less and insisted he knew every rut and bend in the road.

He probably did, but that didn't ease my anxiety. One friend began, politely, to decline his offers of a lift, something that had always been gratefully accepted in the past. And then there was an anonymous letter from someone who had observed my father unsuccessfully trying to vacate a parking bay.

After he'd spent more time in hospital, I volunteered to drive Dad to his GP. During the consultation, I raised the tricky subject of his fitness to drive. The gently spoken doctor placed her hand on his, looked into his eyes and said: "It's probably time, don't you think?" There was a rather lame excuse about needing to drive three miles to the nearest shop, but he quietly sensed his time was up.”

Courtesy of the Daily Telegraph

How to talk to a loved one about their driving

Driver safety can often be a sensitive issue for older drivers. A driver's license signifies more than the ability to drive a car; it is a symbol of freedom and self-sufficiency. Understandably, driving is not a privilege that anyone wants to relinquish willingly. Still, safety must come first.

Some older drivers may be aware of their faltering ability but still be reluctant to give up driving completely. Another person's concerns may force the older driver to act. They may even feel relieved to have someone else help make the decision to stop driving. If you find yourself in the position of talking to an older friend or family member about their driving, remember the following:

- **Be respectful.** For many older drivers, driving is an integral part of independence. Many older adults have fond memories of getting a driver's license. At the same time, don't be intimidated or back down if you have a true concern.
- **Give specific examples.** It's easier to tune out generalisations like “You just can't drive safely anymore.” Outline concerns that you have noticed, such as “You have a harder time turning your head than you used to,” or “You braked suddenly at stop signs three times the last time we drove.”
- **Find strength in numbers.** If more than one family member or close friend has noticed, it's less likely to be taken as nagging. A loved one may also listen to a more impartial party, such as a doctor or driving specialist.
- **Help find alternatives.** The person may be so used to driving that they have never considered alternatives. You can offer positive help, such as researching transport options or offering lifts when possible.
- **Understand the difficulty of the transition.** Your loved one may experience a profound sense of loss having given up driving. Don't dismiss their feelings but try to help with the transition as much as possible. If it is safe, try slowly transitioning the older driver out of driving to give them time to adjust.