



SENIOR DRIVING SAFETY

It's no secret that as we age – and particularly as we reach our senior years – we experience some decline in coordination, reflexes and spontaneous decision-making. Although modest declines in these areas may have little impact on most daily life functions, these changes are more evident when an older parent or grandparent gets behind the wheel of an automobile, where poor judgment or slow reflexes can mean the difference between life and death.

Those of earlier generations had significantly shorter life expectancies and lived in a time period of less traffic and lower speed limits. Today, however, we are living longer, thanks to improved healthcare and abundant research and information about healthier lifestyles – although that, too, is offset by our larger, more concentrated population centers and faster pace of life.

For those who have declining ability to make rapid judgments, coupled with slower reflexes, driving can be a life-and-death decision for themselves and for others. As such, it becomes a serious issue for Families who ask, “How can we take away Dad’s car without upsetting him?”

Driving has become such an intrinsic part of our individual identity that it is viewed today more as an inherent right rather than a privilege. Simply appealing to a parent’s personal safety may not move them to “give up their freedom” by giving up their vehicle if that is a risk they are willing to take.

A far more persuasive and powerful suggestion is to remind the older parent that they must think about the lives and safety of others. A catastrophic accident due to negligence or poor driving skills can take the lives and/or health of other people. It can also result in lawsuits or the loss of a lifetime accumulation of assets.

The best way to allay the fears of all – the older parent, the Family and the legal system – is for the senior’s loved ones to suggest a driving test administered by an independent occupational therapy group. Typically, this includes a road test with a trained instructor, a comprehensive review of the test results, and a decision or recommendation regarding the disposition of the tested individual’s driving ability. This test also provides the following benefits:

- A professional healthcare entity – not law enforcement, a Family member or other individual – administers and reviews results of the driving test
- The driving test is administered objectively by someone with no vested interest in whether or not the senior passes or fails
- Both the aging parent and the concerned Family can experience some relief that the evaluation will be managed professionally, fairly and comprehensively – and a recommendation for the tested individual to surrender their license is reportable and legally binding
- If the driver’s license must be revoked, this approach relieves both the guilt and the burden of the decision from the shoulders of the Family

For additional information, contact the information center at your Somerby Senior Living community – 800-914-4870.