

Taking the Keys Away From Your Parents

One of the hardest discussions you will have with your senior parents is to recommend they stop driving. Taking the keys away can be a very traumatic event for them, because it means a loss of independence and freedom. Unfortunately, many older individuals continue to drive even after they realize they are less than capable.

Even in the best of circumstances and at any age, driving can be a demanding, mentally exhaustive experience! Your vision, dexterity, hearing and reflexes have to be keen. Drivers over 75 have the second-highest rate, after teenagers, of fatal crashes per mile driven, according to Federal Highway Administration data.

Here are some tips from FirstLight HomeCare Sun City to make taking the keys away from your parents as stress free as possible:

1. Take a few casual drives with your parents so you can see first-hand what their driving skills are like. Say your car needs some work and you need a ride, so they don't automatically feel threatened. Are they confused? Do they get lost a lot or get nervous in heavy traffic? Do they frequently hit curbs? This will give you the opportunity to assess their driving abilities.
2. Take them for an eye exam and talk to the eye doctor beforehand. Is their vision good enough to be driving?
3. Approach the conversation slowly and with dignity and compassion. Unless there has been an accident, let them get used to the idea of not driving anymore. Plan a gradual curtailment of driving. Suggest that they drive less, maybe shorter distances or even eliminate night driving.
4. Some states require older drivers to re-take a driver's test or suggest a class to sharpen their skills. AARP and many local hospitals offer special classes for senior drivers. The classes review the rules of the road and special situations seniors should be aware of. Some insurance companies give discounts to seniors who take these classes.
5. Discuss alternative transportation. Don't leave your parents without an option to get around, run errands, go shopping, or get to their doctor appointments. You, your siblings, neighbors or friends can volunteer to be their chauffeur. The Department on Aging, some churches, and most hospitals offer transportation services for seniors and the handicapped. Some shopping centers also have buses that will pick up seniors for free, drive them to the mall, and then home. There are taxi companies that offer senior discounts. Work out the logistics of transportation for them *before* you take away the keys and they feel stranded. Homebound seniors are more depressed, lonelier and may decline in health more rapidly, so it's important for them to get out and about.
6. Discuss the financial savings of no longer driving – no auto insurance (which increases with age) and no car repairs. Remove the temptation by removing the car from their house. Don't hide the keys – they'll find them. Help them decide who to give their car to – maybe a beloved grandson or favorite niece would be a good recipient.

What do you do if your parents absolutely refuse to give up their keys no matter how much you talk about their safety? Unfortunately, this is where tough love comes in. When all else fails, remove

access to the car. Or have an objective third party talk to them, such as their family physician, a minister or a respected friend. Although this can be difficult, you could be saving lives in the end, including your parent's.