

IT MAY BE TIME TO HAVE THE TOUGH TALK WITH AN ELDERLY PARENT

Sometimes We Need to Ask for the Keys

For most of us, our parents were always there when we needed them. They fed us. They clothed us. And they tried to teach us everything they knew - including driving.

But as recent headlines in Santa Monica, California show, there can be deadly consequences to continuing to drive when it's no longer feasible. Statistics show that younger drivers, from 16 of 24, still have by far the most crashes of any age group, but the problem of drivers with poor eyesight and slow reflexes is just going to get worse. In 1995, 1 of every 11 drivers in the United States was over 65. By 2020, 1 of every 5 drivers will be over 65, according to the National Institute on Aging. So how to take away your parents' car keys without them resenting having their independence taken away? Comfort Keepers offers these tips:

- ***Build a case.*** If you feel safe doing so and haven't done so in a long while, take a drive with your parent, where you're the passenger, and get a sense for whether your intuition is right or not. It may turn out that your parent is a safer driver than you suspected; but if your hunch bears out, you'll have at least one reference point to go to, when you have your discussion. If driving with a parent isn't feasible, talk to like-minded relatives, who may have anecdotes of near misses and fender-benders that shouldn't have happened.
- ***Steer the conversation towards recent headlines***—national or local—that involve an elderly driver as the cause of the accident. Get a sense of what your parent thinks. You might want to ask when they plan on giving up driving. You may get an answer like, “Oh, in five or 10 years,” which will help you know what you're up against. Or your shrewd parent might know exactly what you're up to. Either way, the conversation has been started.
- ***The guilt factor.*** Don't be afraid to use it—ask your parents how they will feel if they end up on the news for injuring a pedestrian.
- ***Be gentle but firm; try not to be insulting or confrontational.*** If you make your parents angry or hurt, which may be impossible to avoid, they're more likely to stubbornly cling to the idea that they should be on the road.
- ***Rely on experts.*** Realize that it may be difficult for your parents to agree with you. Suggest that they visit their doctor or ophthalmologist to get an assessment on their reflexes or eyesight. Give them material from publications about older drivers. For instance, you can get this one for free, "Drivers 55-Plus: Test Your Own Performance," AAA Foundation," by writing 1440 New York Ave. N.W., Suite 201, Washington, D.C. 20005.
- ***Most importantly, offer solutions*** to giving up the car, like volunteering to take your parent to church every Sunday or to the bookstore on Saturday mornings. And since you can't always be there, consider turning to a professional caregiver and companion service. Your parent might not be that depressed about relinquishing the car keys, and might even be relieved, to know that when you're not available, around the clock, there are companies like Comfort Keepers, which specialize in providing in-home care for the elderly with companion-caregivers. Bonded and insured, a Comfort Keepers caregiver can provide a variety of services from light housekeeping and meal preparation to grocery shopping or even taking your parent to a doctor's appointment.

###