



Resource Guide

FOR
CAREGIVERS



“Understanding and Helping an Older Driver”



**Older Driver &
Pedestrian *Safety* Project**

New York State Office for the Aging

As we age, we can continue to drive safely longer with the right supports to ensure driving fitness. According to traffic safety experts from across the country, the key is to intervene early before an on-the-road crisis occurs.

The Older Driver and Pedestrian Safety Project administered by the New York State Office for the Aging provides information and education to older drivers so that they may remain safely behind the wheel, when appropriate, or access transportation alternatives when they are not. Information and education is also available for caregivers of older drivers, helping professionals in the community, traffic safety professionals or anyone attempting to help an older driver.

Project Partners and Steering Committee

AARP, Albany County Department for the Aging, Albany County Department of Public Works, Allegany County Older Driver Assistance Network, Alzheimer's Association of Northeastern New York, American Automobile Association – Northway and Hudson Valley, Capital District Transportation Authority, Capital District Transportation Committee, Colonie Senior Service Centers, Inc., Erie County Older Driver Family Assistance Help Network, Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, New York State Department of Health, New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, New York State Department of Transportation, New York State Office of the Aging, Mr. Phil Lepore, Consultant on Older Driver Issues, Rensselaer County Department for the Aging, Schenectady County Senior and Long Term Care Services, Senior & Special Needs Driving, LLC, Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital and Westchester County Older Driver Family Assistance Program.

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COMMON AREAS OF CONCERN ABOUT OLDER DRIVERS

The most common areas of concern about an older driver's driving behavior are:

- Slow reaction time.
- Driving too slowly.
- Not paying attention to other drivers and pedestrians.
- Recent crashes and/or forgetting where they are going.

Traffic Safety experts agree that older drivers and their caregivers should not wait until a crash occurs before they begin thinking about driving safety.

These are some typical concerns expressed by family members:

- "My father drives too slowly and sometimes crosses the yellow line. Then he denies he did anything wrong."
- "My mother has had several car accidents and I'm very concerned."
- "He is 90. Shouldn't he stop driving?"
- "She went to her hairdresser and got lost on the way home."
- "My spouse has Alzheimer's. His license is revoked, but he continues to drive. He steals the keys from my purse."
- "She went to her regular hairdresser and got lost for an hour on the way home."
- "I will not let my children ride with him anymore."
- "Mom was only driving locally. Then she got lost in town. Was lost for several hours. Even ran out of gas. Somehow she called my sister. We sat on it (the problem) for 3 months. Then we went for help."
- "She angrily protested, got angry, cried. She brings it up with relatives and friends. Has gone to see several doctors to try to get them to permit her to drive."
- We usually think about older drivers from one perspective: getting them off the road. But we are headed for a terrific problem with the lack of public transportation, ever-sprawling suburbia and a coming wave of aging baby boomers. What we really need to be looking at is how to keep them driving safely longer."
- "I was married for over fifty years when my spouse died. I eventually got over the loss. But I have not gotten over the loss of my driver's license."

Do any of these statements sound familiar to you?

BASIC FACTS AND STATISTICS ABOUT OLDER DRIVERS

- By 2020, the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration estimates that there will be 40 million licensed drivers age 65 and older.
- In New York State alone there are 750,000 licensed drivers over the age of 75.
- Not only will there be more drivers, but these drivers will travel more miles each year than previous generations and will continue driving at older ages.
- In general, older adults are among the safest drivers on the road.
- Older drivers are more likely to wear seatbelts and have the lowest incidence of alcohol-related crashes. However, they tend to drive in places where more crashes are likely such as surface streets as opposed to highways.
- For every mile driven, the crash rates start to rise for drivers age 75 and increase sharply after age 80.
- According to the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, nearly 200,000 older drivers and older adult passengers are injured as a result of crashes each year.
- Older drivers, especially those over 75, are more likely than younger drivers to suffer injuries or die as a result of vehicle crashes because of their increased susceptibility to injury, particularly chest injuries, and medical complications.
- Most of the driving injuries and fatalities among older adults occur in the daytime, on weekdays, and involve other vehicles.
- The most common errors made by older drivers involve failure to yield right of way or to see oncoming traffic.
- Left turns at intersections are the most frequent place where crashes involving older drivers occur.

These facts and statistics show why it is important to be prepared to talk to older drivers about their continued safety and most importantly plan for a time when they can no longer drive.

The caregiver or anyone attempting to help an older driver needs to begin the conversation early, while the older driver still has full capacity to comprehend and make good choices.

Remember that any decisions made about driving should be based on the driver's capability, not their age.

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF DRIVING FOR OLDER ADULTS

One needs to look no further than the nearest parking lot to understand the importance of driving in our society. Driving allows us to run errands, shop, go to doctors, visit friends, work, volunteer, and attend religious activities. Driving is part of our self-identity, who we are and what we can do. Driving helps us maintain connections with people, places, communities, and activities. Driving allows us to feel in control. Driving includes the pride of owning a car and the convenience of going where we want to when we want to. In addition, one's sense of self identity and independence are closely tied to the freedom to drive.

It is essential to understand the significance and importance that driving has for an older adult and be sensitive to their personal needs.

THE AGING PROCESS AND HOW IT AFFECTS DRIVING

Driving is something we learned many years ago and for most of us it seems like a simple task. However, driving is actually a complicated task that involves multiple skills. Safe driving requires good vision. Safe driving requires good cognition which includes the ability to recognize, remember, decide, and react. Safe driving requires good physical ability such strength, flexibility, and coordination to control the vehicle. Consider for yourself the complexity of driving and the various physiological conditions that make it more demanding for an older adult. There are natural declines as we age in vision, hearing, strength, flexibility, and reflexes that can affect driving. Sometimes there are cognitive changes, too. Some medications interfere with the ability to drive safely by making the person less alert. Chronic conditions such as arthritis can affect a person's ability to drive.

The majority of older drivers are good drivers but sometimes a driver's health or physical limitations can affect the safe operation of a motor vehicle. The aging process can affect a driver's ability to sense, decide and act which are all critical skills needed for safe driving. Knowing the early signs of driving difficulty, both physical and cognitive, allows older drivers and their loved ones to discuss the situation and take appropriate action to maintain their safety and the safety of others in their community.

WARNING SIGNS AND DANGEROUS COPING MECHANISMS

Judgments about dangerous driving should not be based on a single warning sign.

Anyone observing an older driver's driving habits should consider a "pattern" of warning signs or the "degree" of danger that a particular warning sign poses.

The following are just a few of the warning signs that signal that an older driver may be in trouble:

Out of Car Warning Signs:

- Frequent forgetfulness.
- Unusual agitation or anger
- Confusion and or disorientation.
- Loss of coordination, trouble walking, extremely stiff joints, recent falls.
- Shortness of breath or unusual fatigue.
- Difficulty following or giving verbal directions.

In-Car Warning Signs:

- Incorrect signaling.
- Trouble navigating and controlling turns.
- Moving into a wrong lane.
- Confusion at exits.
- Parking inappropriately and hitting curbs.
- Increased agitation or irritation when driving.
- Scrapes or dents on the car, garage, house, or mailbox.
- Ticketed moving violations or warnings.
- A traffic accident.

In-Car Red Flags Indicating that Driving Should be Addressed Immediately:

- Failure to notice traffic lights or signs.
- Driving at inappropriate speeds (too fast, too slow).
- Delayed responses to unexpected situations.
- Getting lost in familiar places.
- Multiple traffic accidents or near misses.
- Confusing the brake and gas pedals.
- Stopping in traffic for no apparent reason.
- You are afraid to ride with them

A decision about driving involves looking at multiple behaviors and the degree of danger that a particular warning sign poses to the community.

If the older driver demonstrates any warning signs, it is time to think about intervening, not just for the driver's safety, but also for the safety of others.

In speaking with an older driver you can ask if they occasionally:

- Feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed about driving.
- Feel that cars come out of nowhere.
- Find that other drivers are frequently honking at them.
- Feel sleepy or less alert when they drive.
- Sometimes think that traffic is unexpectedly speeding by them.

Often an older driver will demonstrate dangerous coping mechanisms when attempting to compensate for their deficiencies.

Two dangerous coping mechanisms related to unsafe driving are:

Driving Too Slowly

- Driving too slowly may indicate that a person is compensating for their reduced reaction time or diminished vision.
- Reacting too slowly at intersections and when making left hand turns can indicate that the person's confidence as well as their cognitive ability to judge the speed of on-coming vehicles may be diminished.

Using a "Co-Pilot"

- Some older couples rely on "copiloting" which occurs when one person steers and the other person instructs the "driver" what to do when the driver is unable to respond in an unexpected situation.
- This is not a case of "two heads are better than one."

Anyone who cannot drive without the assistance of copilot simply should not be driving.

OBSERVING AND ASSESSING DRIVING BEHAVIORS

First-hand knowledge of driving behavior can help caregivers or anyone attempting to help an older driver, know if and when they need to intervene.

Please consider using these suggestions when observing and assessing an older driver's driving behaviors:

- Be vigilant about observing driving behavior.
- Always involve the older driver as much as possible and talk with them as you make your observations.
- Be respectful of the older driver's privacy and always ask permission before talking to their physician or others about driving issues.
- Observe driving behavior even when there are no apparent problems.

To assess whether an older driver needs help, a caregiver will need to:

- Ride with or follow the driver on a regular basis and observe their driving.
- Identify warning signs that driving may be impaired, such as failure to understand traffic signs and signals.
- Note specific incidents, such as running a red light.
- Note strengths as well as deficits.
- Ask the older driver how he or she felt about the drive.
- Talk to the older driver's spouse, companion, friends, passengers and neighbors about what they may have observed and how they believe the older driver is driving.
- Pay particular attention to the driver's health, disposition and behavior, especially when they are not behind the wheel.
- Note any attempts by the driver to restrict their own driving or improve their skills by taking driver courses.
- Inspect the older driver's vehicle for signs of damage or new paint which might be covering up recent crash damage.
- Write down your thoughts and observations so you can remember them when a conversation with the older driver about their safety is needed.

It is difficult to know how well your loved one is driving when you do not live nearby. One way to keep tabs is by developing your own feedback network.

To establish a feedback network you will need to identify people who can keep an eye out for your driver and who will call you when they see a problem.

If your feedback network has some of the following people helping, it is likely you will be alerted by one of them when your driver is having a problem:

- The driver's spouse or companion is in the best position to alert you to any safety problems. However, keep in mind that a spouse or companion may be dependent on the older driver for their own transportation needs, and thus may be hesitant to raise the issue of driver safety.
- Passengers and friends often know how the driver is doing. But, like the driver's spouse or companion, they too may be reluctant to say anything negative because they rely on the driver to get around.
- You will need to pay attention when they speak. In time, their concern for the driver and possibly their own safety will provide helpful necessary feedback.
- Good neighbors never miss a thing. This is one time where you can put their curiosity to good use.
- Family members are often a good source of feedback. Share your concerns for the older driver's safety with them. Your interest in shouldering the burden will often stimulate their assistance.
- The older driver's doctor or pharmacist may be able to alert you when a prescription medication or over the counter has side effects which would place the older driver in jeopardy.
- If possible contact the older driver's eye care provider to find out if they have had their vision examined recently and prescriptions for corrective lenses filled.
- The older driver's spiritual leader such as their minister, priest, rabbi, or other has a role in your feedback network, especially if the driver is actively involved in driving to religious services or to and from an organization's volunteer activities.

Spouses, companions, friends, neighbors, service providers, and even the mechanic at the local garage have potential feedback roles to play in helping you keep an older driver safe.

Find out who will help. Put them on your contact list for feedback.

PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION WITH AN OLDER DRIVER

In preparing for the conversation with an older driver please consider that:

- Hearing sensitive information from the right person can make a big difference.
- Older adults typically prefer to speak confidentially about issues like this with someone they trust.
- Early, occasional and candid conversations establish a pattern of open dialogue and can reinforce driving safety issues without the strain of asking someone to immediately retire from driving.
- Effective conversations encourage future planning and show respect for the older adult's ability to make appropriate decisions.
- With sensitivity toward the feelings of older drivers, caregivers or anyone attempting to help an older driver, can help the older driver make safe driving decisions to ensure their own safety and the safety of others.

Experts in the field of older driver safety and caregiving frequently remind us that:

- Talking with an older driver should begin before problems occur.
- Involving the older driver is essential in order to achieve a successful discussion and decision-making process.
- Married drivers prefer to hear about driving concerns first from their spouse or companion.
- There is frequently a reluctance to talk, especially about issues that are uncomfortable.
- A caregiver may just feel there is no point in trying to talk to the older adult about his or her driving knowing the trouble the conversation may cause.
- Sometimes caregivers may hope that things will just continue to be okay.
- The caregiver has to focus not only on the safety of the older driver but on the safety of others in the community as well.
- More than half of older adults follow suggestions offered in conversations about driving.

The following is a checklist to consider before talking to an older driver about safety concerns:

- Think about the older adult's possible responses before beginning the conversation.
- Understand the older adult's transportation needs such medical, social, religious, shopping, and community activities in advance of the discussion.

- Be prepared to answer the older adult’s most frequently asked question - “How will I get there?”
- Don’t be judgmental about their activities and travel needs. A simple trip to the diner may be a very important social outlet for the older driver.
- Have your written thoughts and observations handy so you can remember them easily when you talk to the older driver.
- Speak of the positives observations you have noted whenever possible.
- Identify what the older adult is doing right to be a safe driver.
- Use these “positives” when starting to talk with the older adult to help offset any negativity.

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- Be knowledgeable about resources designed to help an older driver.
- Consider suggesting that the older driver attend a driver safety refresher course or have a professional driving assessment by a certified driving rehabilitation specialist.
- Know that a certified driving rehabilitation specialist may suggest driver re-training or vehicle modifications, such as wider mirrors or a visor extension which might resolve some safety issues.
- Be able to explain to the older driver that the involvement of an objective third party could help assess the situation and help affect the improvements that are needed.

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- Be knowledgeable about alternative transportation resources that can help if the older driver is no longer able to get around on their own.
- Be prepared to create a list of community mobility options and family, friends, or neighbors willing to help transport the older adult.
- Be prepared to help the older adult understand that not owning a car will save them money that can be used to pay for transportation alternatives.

HAVING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT DRIVING CONCERNS

Your attitude and approach are important to successfully communicate with anyone.

The following are some tips on how to structure your conversation with the older driver:

- Hold a one-on-one conversation with an older driver.
- Avoid holding a large family meeting and “ganging up” on the older driver.
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- Be positive, supportive, and affirming when you talk with an older driver.
- Use good listening skills and make sure they know you are listening to them.
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- Focus on safe driving and maintaining the older adult’s independence, not giving up driving.
- Focus on the older driver’s functional capacity, not on their age or disease.
- Work with the older adult to find solutions that will allow them to drive safely longer.
- Admit that there are no easy solutions and that this decision affects everyone involved.
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- Avoid confrontation.
- Do not talk about “giving up the keys” instead use terms like “safe driving” and “driving retirement.”
- Do not accuse the older driver of being an unsafe driver or start with the assumption that they must stop driving now.
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- Be ready to address anger or denial.
- Be ready to stay calm and not raise your voice.
- Do not respond to personal attacks or get drawn into unrelated issues.
- Use good listening and non-threatening conversation skills.
- Be positive and explain that driving safely, not stopping driving is the immediate goal.
- Stick to factual rather than emotional issues, for example, by saying: “Mom, I don’t want to see you get hurt or hurt anyone else.”
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- Acknowledge steps the older driver has already taken to ensure safe driving, such as driving only during daylight hours and not during rush hour traffic.

- Be able to offer suggestions as to other steps the older driver can take such as driver retraining and vision checks.

If the decision is made to retire from driving, problem solve and work together with the older adult to address how they will get where they need to go.

- Pledge that you will help them figure out how to get to where they need to go if driving is not possible.
- Stress the benefits of using other forms of transportation.
- Talk about the benefits which might include riding with friends on the bus, meeting new people, saving energy costs, and helping the environment.
- Calculate the money that the person will save by not owning and operating a vehicle.
- The costs saved by not owning a car include gasoline and oil, maintenance, repairs, tires, insurance premiums and registration and can be significant for an older adult on a fixed income.
- Point out that those savings can be used for alternative mobility such as a taxi.

If the older driver is dangerous and refuses to make changes or stop driving, find a doctor, a member of the clergy or a family friend to help you.

Intervention of Last Resort:

- As a last resort, you can contact the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles and report the unsafe driving situation.
- The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles will contact the older driver and schedule a driver re-testing session.
- The Department of Motor Vehicles will also revoke licenses pending re-testing if necessary.

To report possible medical or mental conditions, you must complete a DMV DS-7 (Request for Driver Review) form. The DS-7 form may be obtained by calling the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles call Center at (518) 486-9786, on-line at www.nysdmv.com/forms

Please note: The DMV does not accept reports by email or by telephone; and The DMV decides the action to take or can decide to take no action at all.



**“WHEN YOU ARE CONCERNED
A guide for families, friends and caregivers concerned
about the safety of an older driver”**

Family members are usually the first to be confronted by the problems associated with a potentially unsafe older driver. Families may be able to find resources on aging and driving, but commonly lack the ability to assemble all the pieces of the puzzle. What to do when an older driver is impaired, unsafe or at-risk, can be both perplexing and paralyzing for the older driver themselves as well as for families and others worried for the driver’s safety.

The New York State Office for the Aging offers the following publication that can serve as a guide for those concerned about the safety of an older driver.

“When You Are Concerned” is an award winning 56 page publication developed to guide families facing the dilemma of what to do when an aging loved one is at-risk driving.

This publication is based on the successful actions and guidance offered by individuals who have assisted an at-risk older driver to drive safely or helped the driver retire from driving.

A printed copy of the Guide is available by contacting the New York State Office for the Aging, 1-800-342-9871 or NYSOFA@ofa.state.ny.us

A copy of the Guide is also available in down-loadable PDF format on the New York State Office for the Aging’s website <http://www.aging.ny.gov/>
It is posted in the section titled - “Find Help,” “Caring For Older Drivers.”

DRIVING SAFELY LONGER

Safety experts agree that with the right supports, an older driver can continue to drive safely longer.

- While the natural process of aging may ultimately affect the skills required to be a safe driver, the changes usually happen over time.
- Over the course of 10, 20 or more years, older adults may modify their driving several times to accommodate the natural changes in our bodies that aging brings on.
- As changes in vision, hearing, or other health conditions impair driving skills, older drivers need to know how to adjust their habits to maintain safe mobility and community connections.
- Just a few simple adjustments such as limiting driving to certain times can help protect an older driver and those around them from deadly crashes.
- It is important to remember that a driver's age is not a good predictor of driving ability.
- What counts is the driver's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle on the road.

By practicing a few fundamental and common sense safety precautions drivers of all ages can remain safe on the road.

Share the following safe driving tips with your older driver and ask them to follow these simple suggestions:

- Always wear your glasses as required and get your vision checked regularly.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist how your medications may affect your driving.
- Stay in shape - healthy eating, regular exercise and adequate sleep can help you stay alert and may improve your reaction time.
- Be rested - get plenty of sleep. Don't drive when you are physically exhausted or sleep-deprived.
- Never drink alcohol and drive.
- Always wear your safety belts properly, even for quick trips.
- Turn on your headlights when driving, even in the daytime.
- Drive the posted speed limit.
- Drive defensively and move out of an aggressive or distracted driver's way.
- Allow a greater distance between you and the vehicle ahead, so that you will have plenty of time to stop.

- Avoid left hand turns if you are uncomfortable making them.
- If you must make a left make sure you have enough time and space to safely cross the oncoming traffic lane before turning.
- Always use your turn signals and stay in the appropriate lane.
- Keep headlights, mirrors and the windshield of your car clean.
- Keep your mirrors adjusted so that your “second set of eyes” can work for you.
- Always look at the road ahead so that you can see trouble before you reach it.
- Eliminate distractions such as the radio or cell phone.
- If people in the car are distracting you, tell them that they will have a safer ride if they are quiet.
- Plan ahead and know your driving route.
- Take familiar roads.
- Avoid busy intersections and use them at less congested times.
- Take a break after every 90 minutes of driving. Get out of the vehicle and stretch to help relieve stiffness and fatigue.
- Take a driver safety course. You may also qualify for an insurance discount.

DRIVER SAFETY RESOURCES

Driving a car is a life-long learning process. Technology changes, environmental changes and societal changes demand that drivers be adaptable. In order to help with those changes defensive driving programs have been designed to offer the older driver an opportunity to refresh their skills and driving abilities. Defensive driving programs refresh knowledge concerning the rules of the road as well as provide safety tips.

The following information describes the most frequently requested programs. There may be others offered in the older driver's community.

AARP Driver Safety Program

The AARP Driver Safety Program is the nation's first and largest refresher course for drivers age 50 and older. The program is designed to help an older driver:

- Learn how to operate their vehicle more safely in today's increasingly challenging driving environment.
- Tune up their driving skills and update their knowledge of the rules of the road.
- Learn about normal age-related physical changes and how to adjust their driving to allow for these changes.
- Make adjustments to common age-related changes in vision, hearing, medications and reaction time.
- Older drivers taking the course may be eligible for a ten percent discount on their auto insurance.
- To find out about an AARP driver safety session in the older driver's area call 1-888-227-7669 or on the web at www.aarp.org/drive

National Safety Council

The National Safety Council offers a six hour defensive driving course which is provided locally with certified instructors. Features of the course include:

- Learning how to operate their vehicle more safely.
- Learning how to improve driving skills and adhere to the rules of the road.
- Older drivers taking the course may be eligible for a ten percent discount on their auto insurance.
- For a class schedule call 1-800-427-2365 or on the web www.safetycouncil.com

American Automobile Association

The American Automobile Association offers:

- Driver self-assessment tools such as “Roadwise Review,” “DriveSharp Calculator” and “Drivers 55 Plus” are free on-line.
- The local AAA may offer local defensive driving courses for older drivers.
- If you are interested in accessing any of the above AAA resources or for more information about what the local AAA has to offer visit www.seniordrivers.org

Approved Driver Safety Course Providers in New York State

There is also a current listing of Approved Driver Safety Course Providers in New York State on the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles website at:

www.nysdmv.com/pirp.htm

Driver Assessment and Rehabilitation Programs

Driver Assessment and Rehabilitation Programs are available in many communities.

- Driver Assessment/Rehabilitation Programs specialize in the evaluation of health based skills needed for safe driving based on a doctor’s order.
- Although driver rehabilitation programs may vary, most typically include a clinical assessment including a review of driving history, medical review of functional abilities and medication use, as well as a behind-the-wheel assessment of driving skills and safety.
- Individuals who have physical, visual, mental and/or cognitive conditions would benefit from a driver evaluation.
- To locate programs and services that may be offered in your older driver’s community contact the local area agency on aging by looking in the government pages of the phone directory or the New York State Office for the Aging’s Help Line at 1-800-342-9871 or NYSOFA@ofa.state.ny.us

PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT FROM DRIVING

The best approach is to plan ahead for retirement from driving before problems begin.

For those older drivers that are considering or have decided to retire from driving the caregiver will need to take several important steps:

- Ask the older adult which events and activities are most important to continue.
- Problem-solve with the older adult how he or she will get around.
- When appropriate, suggest gradual transition to other transportation options, as opposed to abruptly giving up driving.
- Discuss transportation options.
- Explain how family, friends, neighbors, or others will support the older adult in maintaining their independence.
- If the older adult feels uncomfortable accepting a “free ride,” suggest that they could offer to pay for the gasoline.
- Help the older adult learn how to take the bus if appropriate or use taxi services or senior van.
- Consider traveling with the older adult as he or she learns to use a bus, taxi, or other alternative transportation method.
- Encourage the older adult to travel with a “buddy” to get comfortable with alternative transportation.
- Discuss using delivery services offered by grocery stores, pharmacies, and restaurants, to reduce the need to drive as often.
- Consider mail order prescriptions.

We must always consider the emotional and physical needs of an older adult who can no longer drive.

Transitioning from driving is a huge loss to an older adult and they will need time to grieve.

There is danger in the fact that many older adults who stop driving can become isolated, lose reliable access to health care or undergo a decline in their physical and mental status.

Show them caring and love at this time of life change.

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES FOR OLDER ADULTS

In a society which has largely preferred the individual automobile to most other forms of transport, it should come as no surprise that our transportation system mirrors our very wish. But knowing what we do today, few of us now believe, if we had it to do over again, we should have relied so heavily upon the automobile. Indeed, it is ironic that the rural and suburban locations made possible by the automobile are now destined to strand those who can no longer drive.

When we consider transportation alternatives for older adults, in many areas of the state, there are few available. For example, public transportation may not be available in rural or even outlying suburban areas. Volunteer transportation programs may have waiting lists or be geographically unavailable. To complicate matters even further, family members may not live nearby and may be unable to drive the person when and where they need to go. The good news is that most communities do provide alternative transportation to adequately meet the needs of older adults.

To learn about the transportation alternatives available for an older adult, begin by calling the area agency on aging in the county where the older adult resides.

- If this is the first time you have had to contact an area agency on aging, the term “area agency on aging” may be an unfamiliar one.
- There is an area agency on aging in every county in New York State.
- The area agency on aging is listed in the government pages of your local telephone directory, or on the Internet.
- Contact the New York State Office for the Aging’s Help Line at 1-800-342-9871 or NYSOFA@ofa.state.ny.us to find a local area agency on aging.

This is what an area agency on aging can do to help you:

- The area agency on aging will have a directory listing all of the services for older persons and caregivers in their area including transportation.
- The area agency on aging will have a staff member who can help you with your transportation questions.
- If not, they will refer you to someone in the community who can help.

Please be aware that when you contact the area agency on aging to find out about transportation providers in the community, you will need to be prepared to tell

them if the older adult is able to use a taxi, public transportation or a senior van independently or if they will require assistance.

These are some questions to ask when you contact a local transportation provider:

- What is the service area of the transportation provider?
- What is the eligibility criterion to use the service?
- How much does it cost?
- Are reduced fares offered? If so, how does one receive a reduced fare?
- What are the hours and days of service?
- How much assistance does the driver provide?
- Does the driver help with packages?
- Is there anyone who can go along to help your loved one learn how to use the service?
- If not, ask if you can go along to help.
- What kind of transportation is available for wheelchair bound or persons using walkers or with limited mobility?
- Can a companion ride along?

Be sure to write all of the important contact information down and keep it near the telephone or somewhere that is handy for the older adult to access.

Be sure to keep the transportation plan current; things change:

- Over time, changes in a person's abilities or interests can mean that adjustments need to be made to an older adult's transportation plan.
- Remember that communities are developing new transportation resources all the time as well as refining existing ones.
- Some of these new resources may better meet the needs of the older adult than those that are listed in the current plan. Therefore, it is important to review the transportation plan at least twice a year to ensure that it still works for the person who has had to reduce or stop their driving.
- The key is to keep in touch with the local area agency on aging to find out if new and better choices are available to better serve the older adult.

CAREGIVING AND COPING

The day an older loved one stops driving often marks the day you begin a transition to caregiver. If you were involved in precipitating your loved one giving up the wheel, you may also be feeling guilt in addition to your new caregiving responsibilities. The combination can be physically and emotionally draining. You will need to take care of yourself.

Here are some of the signs and symptoms that you may be needing help:

- Withdrawing from friends.
- Feeling tired after getting sufficient sleep.
- Feeling depressed.
- Feeling resentful.
- Feeling guilty.
- Getting easily irritated.

These are some of the signs of caregiver burnout:

- Losing or gaining weight.
- Not sleeping.
- Loss of appetite.
- Not seeing friends.
- Excessive alcohol/drug use.
- Needing an excessive amount of caffeine.
- Verbally abusing others.
- Having suicidal thoughts/tendencies.

Here are some of the things you can do to prevent burnout:

- Take time out by getting respite and allow someone to give you a break.
- Joining a support group is one of the most helpful ways to cope.
- Exercise, take vitamins and enjoy a proper diet.
- Get counseling or find a friend or relative you can talk to.
- Talk with your clergy or church leader.

Caregiver assistance is no more than a telephone call away.

- Your area agency on aging can link you to confidential help.
- There are also many excellent guides about caregiving and helpful information about local support groups available through the local area agency on aging to help you take care of yourself.

SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS TO SHARE

No one concerned about the safety of an older driver wants to stand by and just worry, but many do. We all understand how important it is for older adults to remain independent, mobile and socially connected. So, it is critical that all caregivers approach the topic of driving as respectfully as possible. It is important to remember that a driver's chronological age is not a good predictor of driving ability. What counts on the road is the driver's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. The resources and steps outlined in this resource guide can be utilized improve your loved one's fitness to drive.

If the time comes when everyone agrees it is time to hang up the keys, many communities have transportation options to get your loved one to the places that they need to go. Make sure you have done your homework and can introduce your loved one to all of the community transportation resources that are available. The local area agency on aging can help.

Caregiving is all about helping your loved ones lead the best possible life.

Staying safe on the road is just another important part of the picture.

For Additional Information:

New York State Office for the Aging
2 Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12223-1251

Help Line
1-800-342-9871

E-Mail
nysosa@ofa.state.ny.us

Web Site
<http://www.aging.ny.gov/>

