

Starting the Conversation About Driving

A guide for the talk families put off longest

No fixed age makes driving unsafe, and there is rarely one moment that settles the question on its own. What usually works is noticing the signs early, choosing a calm time to raise them, and having a real alternative ready before the conversation happens rather than after.

How to use this. *Work through the signs first, on your own. Then use the preparation section before you sit down to talk, and bring the questions to the conversation itself rather than presenting conclusions.*

Signs worth paying attention to

None of these on its own is proof of anything. Several together are worth a conversation.

- ☐ New dents, scrapes, or curb damage on the car with no clear explanation
- ☐ Getting lost or confused on routes driven for years
- ☐ Friends or family feeling unsafe as a passenger, and saying so more than once
- ☐ Slower reaction to brake lights, stop signs, or pedestrians
- ☐ Difficulty judging distance when parking or changing lanes
- ☐ A health condition that affects vision, hearing, or reaction time
- ☐ A new medication with a warning about drowsiness or slowed reflexes
- ☐ A near-miss or minor collision, even one that felt explainable at the time

Before the conversation

How this starts affects whether it goes anywhere.

- ☐ Choose a calm moment, never right after an incident or a scare
- ☐ Decide who should be in the room; more than two or three people can feel like an ambush
- ☐ Have one or two specific examples ready, not a general impression
- ☐ Look into alternative transportation in the area before the talk, not after
- ☐ Expect resistance and plan to listen more than persuade in the first conversation

Questions worth asking together

These work better as genuine questions than as statements.

- ☐ Have you noticed driving feeling any different lately?
- ☐ Has anything happened recently that gave you pause?
- ☐ What would make getting around without driving feel less like a loss?
- ☐ Would you be open to a formal driving evaluation, just to know where things stand?
- ☐ Is there a place you drive to often that we should plan around first?

If the conversation does not settle it

A neutral third party often succeeds where family cannot.

- ☐ Ask a Primary Care Physician to raise driving safety at the next visit
 - ☐ Look into an occupational therapist who offers a formal on-road driving evaluation
 - ☐ Check the state DMV website for its medical review process, as a last resort
 - ☐ Note that some states let a family member or doctor request a formal review directly
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What tends to happen afterward

The conversation is almost always harder than what follows it. Many older adults, once they have stopped driving, describe real relief alongside the loss, relief at not carrying the stress of traffic, and at not fearing for their own safety or someone else's.

Much of the resistance is about what driving represents, not the driving itself: independence, not needing to ask, a life that feels smaller without it. Naming that directly, rather than arguing about safety alone, is often what actually moves the conversation forward.

Important note. *This checklist is general information, not a medical or driving assessment and not legal advice. Discuss health or medication concerns with a clinician, consider a qualified driving evaluation, and check the relevant state DMV process before making decisions.*

Notes and what to buy
