



10 QUESTIONS

To Initiate Productive Conversations with Older Adults Regarding Driving Safety

If you have an older driver in your family, the idea of having “the talk” with them regarding retiring from driving may make you nervous. However, statistically we know that older drivers, especially after age 70, have a significantly higher risk of being involved in a collision for every mile that they drive. Keeping your older driver safe while balancing their desire for independence can be difficult. The following questions are aimed to help you prepare for transitioning your family member from driver to passenger, with care and empathy:

- 1. Do family conversations make a difference?** Put simply: yes, especially if they are held by someone who can demonstrate sensitivity toward the feelings of the driver.
- 2. When is a good time to have this conversation?** Start early and often. Be prepared to have several conversations to achieve your goal. It may be helpful to wrap it into a general retirement discussion.
- 3. Who should have the discussion?** Older adults prefer to speak confidentially with someone they trust, like a close relative. Their top choice? Their spouse. If a spouse is not an option, consider the personalities of other family members and past experiences approaching difficult topics; the most authoritative member of the family may not be the best one to have a productive discussion.
- 4. Should a doctor be involved?** People who have health problems are more likely to listen to the advice of a doctor about driving, however not all doctors agree that they are the best source for making decisions about driving. Family members should work with doctors to determine the most effective level of their involvement.
- 5. Should the police be involved?** Older adults strongly prefer not to hear about driving concerns from police officers, however it may be necessary for older drivers who are unwilling to curtail driving and pose a danger to themselves or others.
- 6. How will they react?** Anticipate that the driver may express strong emotions when someone talks to them about their driving, especially considering the implications of driving cessation. A calm response will help defuse negative emotions about the topic.
- 7. What circumstances create opportunities for having this discussion?** Dementia diagnosis, medication changes, or other recent medical diagnoses are helpful openers for having this discussion.
- 8. How do I prepare for conversations about limiting or stopping driving?** Do your homework and ensure you have good reason to ask a family member to restrict or stop driving. Practice the discussion with someone around you so you are prepared to handle their objections. Additionally, have alternative transportation arrangements ready and available.
- 9. What are good potential conversation openers?** *“Driving isn’t what it used to be.” “Did you hear about the serious car accident in the news today?” “Have you asked your doctor about the effects of your new medication on your driving?” “I’m worried about you getting lost.” “That was a close call yesterday.”*
- 10. What if a high-risk person refuses to stop driving?** Drastic actions may need to be taken including taking away the keys to the car, disabling the car or removing the vehicle altogether. Remember: being unlicensed alone will not keep someone from driving.

Source: 2016 The Hartford/MIT AgeLab survey