

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

A Driving-Skills Checklist for Family Caregivers

The aging process may affect your loved one's ability to drive. As a person grows older, there can be a loss of hearing and visual acuity, changes in physical strength, and a slower reaction time. You may need to discuss driving with your loved one. Here are some warning signs to look out for:

Driver Errors

- Trouble merging into traffic
- Difficulty seeing sides of the road
- Using incorrect signals
- Driving too fast or too slow
- Exercising poor judgment when making left turns
- Drifting into the wrong lane
- Trouble staying in the proper lane
- Confusion at exits
- Tickets (moving violations or warnings)
- Failure to stop at signs or lights
- Failing to give the right of way

Problem Behaviors

- Riding the brake
- Hitting curbs
- Stopping in traffic for no reason
- Not parking between lines or using two spaces
- Agitation and irritation
- Difficulty turning corners
- Frequent close calls
- Confusing the gas and brake pedals or having trouble moving the foot from one pedal to the other
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Misinterpreting or disobeying traffic signs
- Forgetting to turn on the headlights or use turn signals

Underlying Problems

- Easily distracted
- Difficulty turning to look over the shoulder to see blind spot when changing lanes or backing up
- Delayed response to the unexpected: bikers, pedestrians, traffic signs, roadside activity, potential trouble
- Medical condition that may affect ability to drive safely
- Medication that may cause drowsiness
- Difficulty judging distance between one's own car and the car ahead

- Difficulty adjusting vision between dark and light or light and dark (such as when facing oncoming headlights)
- Ignoring potential mechanical trouble with the car

More Clues That It's Time to be Concerned

- Others not wanting to ride along
- Lack of confidence in abilities and nervousness when driving
- Increase in number of other drivers honking horn
- Dents and scrapes on car
- Using a copilot or asking passengers to help look out for cars
- Car accidents

Tips for Helping Your Loved One

- Don't swoop in one day and confiscating the car keys. This almost guarantees anger, resentment, and a nearly total lack of cooperation.
- Prepare what you're going to say. Stick to the facts. (Accidents, close calls, rising insurance rates, failing eyesight and so on.) Don't get caught up in your loved one's anger and begin firing back.
- Enlist the help of his or her doctor to explain why this action is necessary.
- If your care-receiver has given you power of attorney, refer to that when discussing this issue, not as a threat but as a reminder that he or she trusts your judgment. If someone else has power of attorney, ask that person to help you with the discussion.
- Check with the Department of Motor Vehicles in your state. Ask what the procedure is for reporting your concerns. (Also, ask about getting photo ID that is not a driver's license.)
- Remember you need to help your loved one figure out how he or she is going to get around now. When can you drive? When can a family member? Can someone in the parish help out? What about neighbors or friends? Are taxis or buses a possibility? Call the local Senior Information and Assistance number to find out about special low-cost van rides for the elderly.
- And, finally, know that your love, respect and concern can ease your loved one's sense of loss, but can't eliminate it. □