

When to Be Concerned About Senior Drivers

To remain safe as a senior driver, it's important to recognize and understand the physical and mental changes associated with age that can affect an individual's driving ability.

Below are some driving behaviors that senior drivers and their family members should be aware of and how you can develop an appropriate course of action if they're problematic.

Driving Behaviors to Watch For

As a senior, it can be hard to notice gradual changes in your own driving ability. By being aware of problematic behaviors, you and your family members will be able to **determine when you may need to surrender your license**.

Here are a few of the **driving behaviors** that could be cause for concern:

- **Failing to stop at signs or red lights.**
 - If road awareness is an issue, recognizing stop signs and traffic signals could be a problem.
- **Failing to yield the right of way.**
 - This includes turns at 4-way stops, left turns, intersections, and pedestrian crosswalks.
- **Unsafe lane changes.**
 - Problems merging and cutting other drivers off when changing lanes are examples.
- **Inability to stay in his or her lane.**
 - Swerving or drifting into another lane when turning are considered dangerous behaviors.
- **Driving too fast or slow.**
 - This may show the inability to keep track of the posted speed limit signs or to control the vehicle properly.
- **Getting lost frequently, even on common routes.**
 - Mental fatigue and confusion are also warning signs.
- **Difficulty judging distance.**

- This increases the chance of a collision.

In addition to these behaviors, if **collisions, vehicle damage**, or an **increase in traffic violations** occur, it's important to consider these to be warning signs that may require more immediate action.

Having the Conversation

As with any problem in life, it's important to have someone you can talk to if driving safety has become an issue. Whether the conversation is initiated by the senior driver or by a family member, try to remember these tips for having a successful discussion:

- **Focus on safety.**
 - The primary reason for the discussion is being safe behind the wheel and avoiding a collision that could result in injury or death.
 - Remembering that safety is priority number one will help you both to avoid any of the negatives that may come up.
- **Have a one-one-one discussion.**
 - Including too many people can make things chaotic and stressful.
 - Instead, choose one person you feel comfortable confiding in who will be open to listening and helping you decide on the best course of action.
- **Talk about independence.**
 - Surrendering your license can seem like losing your independence. Make sure you both talk about alternative transportation options that allow you to maintain some level of personal independence.
- **Show support.**
 - It's important to show compassion for your loved one before a decision can be made. Understand that you may be asking them to relinquish their independence—***and that is a very difficult thing.***
 - Listening to the person and being sympathetic to their needs will help you find an appropriate solution.

Questions You Should Ask

It's important to be open and honest when deciding whether or not driving is a safe option.

If you are concerned safety may be an issue for a senior driver, here are some of the important questions you should ask:

- **Are you taking any medication?**
 - Some prescriptions can affect the ability to operate a motor vehicle safely.
- **Is there any recent medical diagnosis that could be a problem?**
 - Some of the conditions that could make it difficult to operate a vehicle include:
 - Arthritis.
 - Diabetes.
 - Parkinson's disease.
 - Cataracts.
 - Glaucoma.
 - Macular degeneration.
 - Dementia.
 - Alzheimer's disease.
 - Hearing impairments.
 - Seizures.
- **Are you confident driving?**
 - If a senior chooses not to drive as often or seems reluctant to drive, it could signal a problem.
- **Have you had any recent accidents?**
 - If so, action may need to be taken.
- **Has driving become more stressful?**
 - Agitation with other drivers or becoming tense about certain driving situations may not be healthy.
- **Would you be willing to take a driving course?**
 - The willingness to take a [mature driving course](#) or adapt to changes related to aging could signal that your loved one may still be able to operate a vehicle safely.
- **Have you considered a professional driving assessment?**
 - Since surrendering a license can be hard for some, ask if he or she would be willing to receive professional advice. Many clinics offer a professional driving assessment that can help determine whether or not vehicle operation is still a safe option.

Have a Concrete Plan

Once an agreement has been reached regarding a senior driver's next steps, you'll need to have a plan.

Here are some of the things you'll want to consider when deciding what needs to happen next:

- **If they're going to continue driving, they should:**
 - Consider taking a **mature driving course**.
 - Discuss with their doctor when to take **medications** that may affect their driving.
 - Make changes to their **driving position** to improve steering and visibility.
 - Decide **at what times** it is no longer safe to drive, such as:
 - Rush hour.
 - At night.
 - On busy roads.
 - Long trips alone.
- **If they plan to stop driving, they should:**
 - **Surrender their license** and get an [identification card](#).
 - [Sell their vehicle](#), if necessary.
 - Cancel their **insurance**.
 - Find out about alternate methods of **transportation**.

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