

Older Adults and Driving: A Brief Guide

Figuring out when or if to stop driving is one of the most difficult issues facing older adults and their families. Driving, simply put, represents independence and can help decrease isolation. When determining if an older adult should stop driving, it is important to remember that driving ability is more related to capacity than to age.

How do I know when it is no longer safe for my parent to drive?

Many physiological changes occur during aging that can make driving more difficult and potentially more dangerous. In particular, be aware of eyesight, hearing, reflex, and memory problems, as well as medication imbalances.

In addition, the following driving behaviors should be considered:

- Trouble with basic driving skills, specifically sudden lane changes or left hand turns, not using turn signals correctly, not understanding road signs, or accelerating or decelerating suddenly for no apparent reason.
- Near accidents; dents or scrapes on the car.
- Increased traffic citations.
- Getting lost in familiar places or taking much longer than usual to return from somewhere familiar.

How do I talk to my parent if I am concerned about his or her driving?

- Broach the subject before there is a serious or obvious problem.
- Have the conversation one-on-one rather than involve the whole family.
- Do not have the discussion while your parent is driving or about to drive.
- Have a plan for the conversation:
 - Be prepared to explain why you think your parent should stop driving.
 - Identify specific problems and give specific examples.
 - Research alternative transportation options beforehand.
 - Be positive and stress the benefits of using other forms of transportation.
 - Involve your parent in the decision-making process and pledge your support.
- Suggest a driver improvement class through the California AAA to help improve driving and potentially lower insurance rates.
- Be patient and don't be put off by initial negative reactions.
- Back off if your parent is resistant.
- Bring a professional geriatric social worker or a doctor into the conversation if your parent resists speaking to you about driving.

If my parent needs to stop driving, what are the alternatives?

When encouraging an older adult to stop driving, it is essential to help them figure out how they will continue to get around. There are many alternatives to driving, including:

- Public transportation like BART and AC Transit.
- Local community-based services like Paratransit.
- Taxi cabs (some Paratransit programs offer discounted taxi scrip to eligible seniors).
- Fee-for-service senior transportation services such as Silver Ride (www.silverride.com) and Driver Please (www.driverplease.com).
- Special needs transportation services like the American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery (www.cancer.org).
- Buses offered by senior centers or community centers.
- Carpooling, walking, or relocating to a neighborhood that is closer to services.

Where can I get more information about driving?

- www.unitedwride.gov – Information on federal transportation programs.
- www.eldercare.gov – Locate eldercare resources, local area agencies on aging, and community-based organizations.
- www.seniortransportation.easterseals.com – Information on transportation resources for seniors.
- www.caregiver.org – Information on dementia and driving.
- www.alz.org – Information on dementia and driving.
- <http://seniordriving.aaa.com/> – information about driving classes, aging, and driving

In addition, the elder care professionals at Jewish Family & Children's Services of the East Bay are available to meet with you and your family to discuss driving as well as other issues related to aging. For more information on the ways in which JFCS/East Bay can help you and your family, contact our free Senior Information Line at (510) 558-7800, ext. 716 or email information@jfcs-eastbay.org.

About Jewish Family & Children's Services of the East Bay

JFCS/East Bay is a nonprofit, nonsectarian agency providing mental health and social services to more than 8,000 individuals, families, children, seniors, Holocaust survivors, and refugees of all affiliations, races, and backgrounds in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. JFCS/East Bay's Department of Adult Services offers home care, consultations with geriatric specialists, care management, support groups, educational events, a senior information line, and counseling to older adults and their families.

Jewish Family & Children's Services of the East Bay

2484 Shattuck Ave., Suite 210 / Berkeley, CA 94704 / (510) 704-7475

1855 Olympic Blvd., Suite 200 / Walnut Creek, CA 94596 / (925) 927-2000

