

News Column for week of April 11, 2022

Barbara Stockebrand  
Southwind Extension District –Yates Center  
Family and Consumer Sciences

### Letting Go of the Keys

At one time in your life, your parents would have been the ones that either granted or revoked your driving privileges. However, when the tables are turned, and the driving privileges of older parents become the responsibility of the adult children, conversations around the topic can become tense.

It's one of the most uncomfortable conversations to be had – when to let go of the car keys. It doesn't matter whether the driving landscape is rural or urban, the conversations are similar in either scenario.

Some older adults are able to evaluate their own confidence level in their driving skills. They may decide for themselves that it's time to give up the car keys and not put their family through what can be a difficult transition. However, some other things may be given up in the process – their unlimited freedom and independence – making this one of the hardest decisions for older adults.

Safety is the utmost concern for both the aging adult and others who share the road with them. Age-related changes to both the body and brain can affect vision, hearing, reaction time, and judgment, as well as potential side effects created by various medications. There's no one number or age that can be identified at which it's time to turn over the keys. Because we all age differently, some individuals at age 85 may be safer on the road than others at age 60.

Some indications that it may be time to consider letting go of the keys: The driver gets lost on familiar routes, the driver has a near-miss or a recent crash, there are new dents/scratches on the vehicle, the driver gets a ticket for a driving violation, chronic health issues have become worse or the driver suffers from an illness that may affect driving, the driver drives too slowly or speeds for no reason, or medications are being taken that can affect driving safely.

If you think it's time to talk about taking the car away from an elderly parent, here are some tips to help you figure out how to convince an elderly parent or loved one to stop driving:

--Be Ready to Listen. Start by explaining there is likely to be a day when he/she is not safe to drive. Ask if they have thought about how they want that to go and when they will know they are not safe to drive? Try to listen to their perspective, their concerns and feelings, in order to make them feel more in control of what is happening.

--Start off slow. Maybe there hasn't been an accident yet, but the older adult seems to have more trouble driving after dark. Start by encouraging them to stop driving at night.

--Take them to the doctor. It's good practice to accompany our older loved ones to doctor appointments so that nothing the doctor says gets lost in translation. You can call the doctor's office ahead of time to tell them some of your concerns privately before coming in with your parent.

--Research alternative methods of transportation. In the city, it may be learning bus or train schedules or other options available for public transportation. Are family or friends willing to support their transportation needs? Doing some legwork for your aging parent will take a significant amount of stress out of the process for them.

Primary care providers and law enforcement may be alternatives for support when serious concerns in driving safety exist. Doctors can have medical input when medical conditions are present that interfere with driving.

Law enforcement cannot just take away a driver's license. However, there is a 'Letter of Concern' form available through [www.ksrevenue.org](http://www.ksrevenue.org) that can be completed to request an evaluation of a Kansas driver when impairment may be suspected. The form initiates medical and vision forms to be completed by the driver's primary care provider that may lead to the driver needing to pass a driving test. These forms are evaluated on a case by case basis. Information shared on the form is kept confidential.

When driving safely does come into question, it's most important to reassure our older loved ones that we are not trying to take away their driving privileges to hurt them, but rather to help them.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.