

Taking the Car Keys Away? And It's Not Your Teenage Son; It's Dad!

Imagine yourself telling your dad, who taught you to drive, that he can't drive and you need to take away the car keys! Imagine allowing your dad with dementia to be the driver for your mother who has visual deficits! Imagine someone being injured by your mother because she is not safe to drive!



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I now have some of you sitting in that uncomfortable place, knowing that you will have to take away a right and freedom that most can't think of not being able to have, like driving – especially those of us who live in areas where public transportation is limited or inaccessible. My own mother recently remarked that she guesses when she can't drive, she will have to move and most likely she is right.

Before I talk about how to face the dilemma of removing driving privileges, I want to make a point about the older adults in our community who make good and timely decisions on their own. Many drivers come to terms with not being able to drive on their own due to visual or mobility issues. Some individuals have come to this decision because driving is stressful and causes them anxiety (I think all of us can agree with this at times). Can you make a pledge to stop driving when you feel at risk or fear putting others at risk?

Those with dementia or other cognitive deficits are usually the most challenging individuals for families and professionals to convince that they can't drive for safety reasons. The argument is usually something like, "I've been driving safely for 70 years without an accident" or "I taught you to drive; you are not going to tell me what to do." Even those who have not had their license renewed will drive if they have access to their car – thus forcing

families to arrange for an intervention, like disabling the car, removing the keys or taking the car itself.

If you have a parent (or parents) with mild dementia, have you observed them driving – are they and others safe? Would you allow your young child to ride along as a passenger? Have they ever been lost while driving? Are there scrapes on the car? Have they gotten tickets? Is there driving needed by the spouse who doesn't drive? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it could be time for an intervention:

1. Ask Dad if he would stop driving because it worries "you." If he says, no and you are worried, there is a California DMV form called "Report of Driver with Dementia". This report can be made by a friend, family member, neighbor or other concerned person and is confidential - the person being reported doesn't know who did it. The DMV will then test the driver and possibly take the license away.

2. If you are a family member, you can help reduce driving episodes by having groceries or prescriptions delivered. You can pick your parent up for medical appointments and make the outing fun with lunch out or a drive to a favorite shop or park. You could hire a housekeeper/cook who is really a

caregiver who can say she or he loves to drive and do all the driving. This intervention is a more natural way of gently reducing the need to drive and eliminating driving without having a battle.

3. Reasoning is always a challenge with individuals who have a dementia, but you can point out to them how much it costs to keep a car. Expenses of insurance, gas, repairs, licenses versus how easy it would be to call a cab when they want to go out – the cost is usually much lower (depending on the distances).

4. If you do need to take those keys, you probably will have to take away the car. Be sure you have the legal authority to do this and let the local police know what you have done so that when your parents call and report that their car was stolen, the police will be prepared with a response.

The Hartford Insurance Company has a wonderful booklet called "At the Crossroads, A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & Driving". It is available in Spanish and English. You can order one at www.thehartford.com/alzheimers. We have copies of this booklet and the DMV "Report of Driver with Dementia" forms in our office. Come visit us!

Many older drivers need individually created interventions that respect dignity, keep the elder safe and are within the law. A Professional Geriatric Care Manager is an option to help you design an intervention that works.

Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Caregiving, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808.



Go Green & Receive the E-newsletter!

To receive this newsletter by email and to conserve paper, please send a request to DanielleG@EldercareAnswers.com



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Class Registration: Please call at least 3 days ahead for more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or email us at info@EldercareAnswers.com

Families Dealing with Dementia
Friday, June 18, 2010 from 10 AM to Noon

Middle of the Road Dementia
Friday, July 9, 2010 from 10 AM to Noon

Walnut Creek

Community Classes

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member
2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595
1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM
605 A Cheney St., San Francisco, CA 94131

Cost for Support Groups: None
Support Group Registration: Not required

Support Groups