

News For Older Americans

Spotlight On Senior Driving: When To Transition To The Passenger Seat

(NAPSA)—A growing number of families will be looking for advice on how to approach a difficult subject: When should an older family member make the transition from the driver's seat to the passenger side?

There are more than 30 million drivers aged 65 or older on the road today, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration—a number that will sharply increase over the next few years.

In fact, by 2012, 10,000 Americans will turn 65 each day. Certainly, many older drivers maintain excellent skills and have the safety records to prove it, but health conditions, medications and the normal physical and mental changes associated with aging—diminished vision, hearing, strength and cognitive ability—make driving more difficult and risky as we age.

Challenging road conditions brought about by winter weather add to the concern.

For family members and caregivers, identifying early warning signs can be as easy as taking a ride with a senior driver.

According to Dave Melton, director of Transportation Technical Consulting Services at the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety in Hopkinton, Mass., extended family time over the holidays is an opportunity to observe their driving skills and watch for warning signs that may include the following:

- Close calls with other vehicles or stationary objects such as garages or curbs



Seniors with diminished driving skills have other transportation options. A new Web site offers tips on transitioning from the driver's seat.

- Lane drifting
- Trouble reading signs and staying focused
- Missing exits or turns
- Failing to use signals
- New dents or scrapes

In addition, Melton encourages families to explore safe, alternative transportation solutions in the community; encourage loved ones to avoid driving at night, during rush hour and inclement weather; and promote driving evaluations that test visual and hearing capacities.

When the time is right to begin the discussion, Melton recommends respectfully asking a loved one how he or she feels when driving and urges family members to listen to concerns and respond with patience and kindness.

“The transition from driving is a long and gradual process,” said Katherine Freund, founder and president of ITNAmerica, the first and only national nonprofit transportation system for the country's aging population. “It's

best to think of the discussion with a loved one as a supportive, gradual process rather than a confrontation. The new Liberty Mutual Web site is a great way for families and caregivers to become comfortable with that process.”

While many families will gladly provide transportation for aging family members, geographic distance, work schedules and time commitments often make giving rides on a regular basis a challenge. That is why ITNAmerica created a community-based transportation solution that provides alternative senior transportation for any need, any time.

Offering services in private automobiles 24 hours, seven days a week, the system allows seniors to stay active and involved in their communities by driving them to and from classes, group gatherings, doctors appointments, grocery shopping, visits to the salon, and even dates.

“Driving has always been a symbol of independence,” adds Freund. “Many seniors feel that their cars are the only way to remain engaged and active in their communities. There are alternatives that allow them to maintain that level of activity without sacrificing their safety.”

Families and caregivers who wish to learn more about safe driving for seniors, including tips for identifying driving abilities and how to have the conversation about transitioning to the passenger seat, can visit www.libertymutual.com/seniordriving.