

Catholic Mutual...CARES

Elderly Drivers

Employee and volunteer drivers are important in allowing the Church to fulfill its ministries. It is essential to develop a “best practices” approach when utilizing employees or volunteers to drive on behalf of the church or school. One best practice is to carefully screen any driver to ensure they are capable of driving in a safe manner.

With the number of elderly drivers expected to explode in coming years, the question of when is it time to turn over the keys because of diminished abilities comes into play. Data shows that driving gets riskier with age. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that over 700 older adult drivers are injured and 19 are killed in auto accidents in the U.S. each day.

Risk Factors of Aging that Can Affect Driving Ability

- **Visual Decline.** Vision declines with age, which means depth perception and judging the speed of oncoming traffic becomes more difficult. Additionally, the eyes lose the ability to process light, which makes night vision worse and causes more sensitivity to bright sunlight and glare. By age 60, it takes three times the amount of light that was needed at age 20 in order to drive safely after nightfall.
- **Hearing Loss.** Approximately one-third of adults over age 65 are hearing-impaired. Because hearing loss happens gradually, a senior may not realize they are not hearing sounds such as honking and emergency sirens.
- **Medications.** People usually take more medications as they age. Certain medications, as well as a combination of medications can increase the risk of driving. It is important that seniors are verifying with their physician and pharmacist that it is safe to drive while taking medications.
- **Drowsiness.** Aging can make sleeping more difficult, resulting in daytime tiredness and an increased tendency to doze off during the day (or while driving). In addition, certain medications can cause drowsiness.

Warning Signs That Indicate a Senior Citizen Should Quit Driving Include:

- **Frequent Accidents.** Whether these incidents are serious or minor, driving restrictions may be necessary if an unusual number of accidents occur.
- **Discovering New Damages.** New scrapes, scratches or dents to a senior citizen's vehicle are a clear indication that driving privileges may need modification.
- **Sudden Increase in Traffic Violations.** If there is an increase in traffic violations and more money is spent on paying traffic tickets and insurance, it is time to consider quitting driving.

- **Visual and Hearing Problems.** If there is difficulty viewing traffic signs, pavement markings, or street signs, it is a clear indication that it is time for an eye exam. If there is difficulty seeing after dark, there may need to be a daylight driving restriction.
- **Losing the Way.** If a senior is having difficulty finding their way around familiar places like their neighborhood, a bigger problem may exist. A medical examination to rule out conditions like Alzheimer's or dementia is suggested.
- **Trouble with Mobility.** Mobility troubles while driving can be a serious issue. Every driver must be able to turn the wheel at a moment's notice and look at blind spots. Too often there are dangers that a driver must react to quickly. If a driver's mobility causes a delay in these movements, it's time to consider no longer driving.
- **Slow Response Times.** Many senior citizens experience slower reaction times, which is a normal part of aging. However, slower reaction times can prevent a driver from avoiding a sudden traffic collision. Unexpected and sudden situations can also cause pedal confusion, such as pressing the gas pedal instead of the brake pedal.

Steps to Take if You Are Concerned About the Safety of a Senior Driving

- Approach the subject respectfully and acknowledge that you understand the difficulty of no longer driving. You might start off by saying "I know this is a sensitive subject, but we need to talk about your driving." Then, share a few specific concerns in a kind way. Emphasize that you're not accusing them of being a bad driver. Instead, focus on the senior's health conditions or other aging-related issues that make their driving unsafe.
- If you are concerned about a senior driver, closely monitor their driving before deciding whether they need to brush up on their driving skills or give up their driver's license altogether.
- Encourage a driving evaluation through your local Department of Motor Vehicles or with CarFit. CarFit is a free nationwide program developed by AAA and AARP with trained specialists that teach senior drivers the benefits of being properly positioned in a car. It also puts them in contact with experts who can answer questions and suggest a check-in with a physician or ophthalmologist if one is needed. Additionally, Catholic Mutual Group offers an online Defensive Driving Curriculum and AARP offers Driver Safety Courses.
- Offer the senior some self-evaluation tools to assess driving risk. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute offer driver assessment questionnaires.
- Explore ways to reduce driving, such as making online purchases and arranging for home delivery of groceries.
- Gather support from the senior's primary care physician, family members, and friends.
- Research and propose alternative modes of transportation. The senior may be able to continue to drive during the day, stay off busy roads, or use transportation services such as taxi, Uber or Lyft. Additional options include arranging a ride schedule with other employees, parishioners and family or hire a private car service for several hours each week.
- Prepare a list of observations about the seniors driving ability that concerns you.

When a Senior Driver Refuses to Give Up the Keys

If a senior driver refuses to give up the keys and they are a risk to others and themselves, some steps you can take include:

- File an unsafe driver report with your state DMV. A DMV representative will then contact the senior and request a medical evaluation; a driving test may also be required. Depending on the findings, the senior's license may be restricted or revoked altogether.
- Ask the senior driver's doctor to write a prescription stating "No Driving."
- Enlist the help of a local police officer to explain the importance of safe driving and the legal implications of unsafe driving.
- Some seniors may forget they aren't supposed to drive. If that is the case, it may be necessary to take away car keys, disable the car, remove the car from the senior's residence, hide or "lose" the keys, sell the car, or take the car for extended repairs.

Additionally, if you are aware of a senior that is no longer safe behind the wheel it is better to talk to them about giving up their keys than hurting themselves or other innocent people, even children. As difficult as it is to have the conversation with a senior about no longer driving, it is important to deal with the issue sooner than later.

***State Testing for Senior Drivers**

Driving laws and requirements for seniors vary from state to state. Many states require senior citizens to renew their driver's license in person and/or take a vision test. Some states may also require a written test or a driving test. State specific laws related to seniors can be verified at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

<https://www.after55.com/blog/senior-citizens-driving/>

<https://www.seniorsguideonline.com/senior-health/senior-citizen-driving>

<https://www.caring.com/caregivers/senior-driving/>

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