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When The Keys Must Be Removed

If a senior's driving has become an issue and taking away the keys is the only option available, then it is important to have a plan in place to have this very difficult discussion.

Consider the following;

- Come prepared with the evidence. Now, this is not court but having a case prepared to present to the senior is the best way to go. Have a list of traffic tickets, accidents, damage to the vehicle and even neighbors who may have witnessed unsafe driving
- Be specific. Think of it this way, would you rather be the one to tell your loved one it's time to stop or should it be a judge in court in front of the public and maybe even make the newspapers?
- If you can't do it, talk to a professional. Have a doctor write a script stating no driving, perhaps a local clergy could have the discussion
- Make of list of the cost saving that giving up the keys would amount to. No gas, no oil changes, no insurance, etc.
- Have a list of alternative transportation arrangements in place. Explore home health care agencies that could help and grocery delivery services and meal delivery services

The things I mentioned above are concrete steps, but what about the emotional content of the conversation? I suggest this:

- Don't play hardball and make accusations. Taking away the keys for some could be the last piece of independence for the senior and represents a radical life event. Approach this conversation with empathy. Put yourself in their place and how would you feel.
- Make sure other family members are involved with the

conversation.

- Be honest and treat the senior like an adult and not a child. Remember, sitting with you is the person that stood by your side decades earlier when you first picked up the keys, or when you had relationship problems or were sick. Make sure the conversation is adult to adult, no accusations, no finger pointing, just a talk about the truth and about the dangers. Honesty, "We don't want you to get hurt or to hurt others" is the best plan.
- Explain the alternatives and even involvement in a ride sharing program that could help them meet others in a similar predicament. Getting old is not a sin, we will all be there and with age comes limitations. It's a reality.
- You could withdrawal the car slowly. For instance, no driving after dark, or in the rain. Stay off highways and no children or grandchildren in the car.

If you have tried every way to convince them that driving is no longer an option and yet they continue to try and drive, you may want to disable the car, especially if it is someone with dementia. Removing the battery cable or other electrical components will do the job.

There could also be other issues besides age that could also be a reason to stop driving. Vision issues, side effects from medications, heart problems such as tachycardia, pain and even addiction could be a reason to take away the keys.

Once you have accomplished the task, help the person set up rides and other forms of assistance until they are comfortable doing it themselves. Remember, you have taken away one form of self-sufficiency but now you are helping them establish another form of being self-sufficient.