

WHO SAYS WHEN IT'S TIME TO TURN IN THE KEYS?



Driving is both a symbol of individuality and necessity for independence. This is why the prospect of not being able to drive poses such a threat to so many people. When Sharon, a 51-year-old bank officer and mother of three teenagers, suggested to her mother, 83, that she should stop driving, she hit a wall.



MOTHER: “My daughter needs to pay attention to her own problems instead of sticking her nose into my driving.”

DAUGHTER: “I know driving is a sign of independence, but I never thought Mom would lash out at me.”

SHARON'S STORY

I could see the surprise in Mom's face when I told her that I thought she shouldn't drive anymore. Her shock turned to anger. I was in no position to tell her what to do, she said; she would run her own life. Mom said some pretty hurtful things that I'll have a hard time forgetting.

My mom and dad were extremely independent people from a small town in Texas. When my two older sisters left for college, Mom and I got really close, and I have always thought of her as my best

friend. When Dad died nine years ago, I talked her into moving to the town where my husband and I live.

Things went okay, even though this is a much larger town than she was used to. She bought a small house, got involved with a church, and saw our family a few times a week. Over the last year, however, Mom's age started to catch up with her. She has high blood pressure and was hospitalized for two days when she fell and fractured a rib. It took a long time for her to recover. Since

then, I have had to take a hard look at reality. Mom's eyesight is poor and she moves slowly. The last few months have really taken everything out of her, and I just want to do everything I can to protect her and see her improve.

She had never been a great driver anyway, but when I saw how much difficulty she had moving around, I thought that surely she couldn't be safe driving. I asked her to stop for her own sake because I did not want her to end up in the hospital again. Also, I'm concerned that she will endanger others. I know that driving is a sign of independence, but I've assured Mom I will take her wherever she wants to go. I never suspected that she would be angry and certainly never thought she would lash out at me.

JULIA'S STORY

I have always cared for myself. Sharon does not understand that I have to drive to get to the store and my church. She's busy with her family, and I don't want to be a burden to her. Besides, Sharon has some problems with her oldest son and needs to pay attention to taking care of his problems instead of sticking her nose into

my driving and telling me what to do.

I've been driving for 60 years and have never had an accident. When I moved to town after my husband died, I was scared to death to drive in traffic, but Sharon told me I could get used to it. Well, I did. I slowed down a little and paid really close attention. And I still haven't had an accident. Now, Sharon wants me to give up driving after she was the one who told me I could do it. I know that I've had some trouble lately and I don't see as well as I once did, but I know I can still drive.

HOW THEY WORKED IT OUT

When Dr. Hargrave saw Julia and her daughter Sharon, they were stuck on different sides of the issue, and that caused a fracture in their relationship. He wanted to help them solve the problem about driving so they could resume their emotional closeness.

I explained to Sharon that her mother's slight physical deterioration did not necessarily mean that she was an unsafe driver. Many older people start compensating for slowing reflexes or poorer vision by actually driving more carefully. "It may not be the speed or the way you like to drive," I said, "but try to be more objective about whether or not her driving is really a danger."

Julia wanted to maintain her independence and was unfamiliar with alternatives for transportation

around town besides keeping her own car. But she acknowledged that she had some physical problems and that she didn't see as well as she once did.

"You know there is a possibility that your health and sight may worsen," I said, and followed up by asking, "When do you think it's a good time for people to stop driving?" She thought about this for a moment, then said, "When they become unsafe behind the wheel." I asked how they would know when they were unsafe. "When they have accidents and people or police say

I discussed with Julia the idea that she might have to stop driving in the future, so it was best that she get familiar with alternate transportation to maintain her independence. She agreed that once a month she would either have her daughter take her to church and the market or she would take a cab.

After driving her mother, Sharon realized that the risk of danger was low. On the other hand, Julia got accustomed to depending on her daughter for transportation on the once-a-month trip. The emotional turmoil subsided and mother and daughter resumed their friendship.

Later in the year when Julia had another fall and fractured her arm, she made the transition to not driving at all. "I have to give up driving sometime," she admitted, "and I can count on my daughter to get me where I need to go."

they shouldn't drive anymore," she answered.

Julia's trips to the market and to her church were short and required her to cross only one major intersection that had a traffic light. I asked Sharon to join her mother on these rides in order to more realistically judge the safety factor. A few days later, Sharon reported back, "You were right. My mother doesn't drive the way I do—she tends to be slow and deliberate—but I didn't see her do anything that I could say was unsafe."

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

- Incorrect signaling.**
- Trouble navigating turns.**
- Moving into a wrong lane.**
- Confusion at exits.**
- Hitting curbs.**
- Driving at inappropriate speeds.**
- Delayed responses to unexpected situations.**
- Not anticipating dangerous situations.**
- Scrapes or dents on car, garage, or mailbox.**
- Increased agitation or irritation when driving.**
- Parking inappropriately.**
- Getting lost in familiar places.**
- Near misses.**
- Ticketed moving violations or warning.**
- Car accident.**
- Confusing brake and gas pedals.**

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