

Driving with Dementia

When a loved one is living with dementia, putting a stop to his or her driving privileges is inevitable. It is also one of the most difficult tasks a caregiver or a family member will ever face.

Driving a car is one of the last stands of independence a person will fight to retain. Once he or she can no longer travel to and from on their own, dependence upon others becomes a necessity.

While still in the early stage of most dementia-related diseases operating a vehicle may still be an option, but this time period may not last long. Every individual is different. Family members need to watch for significant signs to alert them to when it is time to step in. Some common indications can be: getting lost in familiar areas, driving too fast or too slow, ignoring traffic signs, becoming easily upset or angry. One thing is for sure, we don't need any more road rage than what's already out there.

When the day comes that you've decided enough is enough you must be firm and resolute. The subject cannot be open to discussion. "Well, you seem fairly clear headed today; I guess you'll be okay." No, it doesn't work that way. They could be fine pulling out of the driveway and then two miles down the road become drenched in confusion, unable to find their way home.

My father's last driving experience was an outing to the post office. He drove himself there to mail out his monthly bills and pick up any mail deposited in our post office box. He got himself half way home, then

turned around to mail the bills he already sent. Unable to find the already mailed envelopes, he worked himself into a fluster. He started driving home and spun the car around once again. He finally arrived home three and a half hours later as white as a ghost. I made sure that was the last time he ever drove a car. If I knew then the information I'm about to tell you now, I could have made the undertaking of this non-driving campaign much less tormenting.

I informed my dad that his doctor had called the Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) and had his licence revoked. This brought on months of four letter words and proclamations that the state department must be brainless for listening to his doctor (who he swore he'd never see again).

However, now in Florida and many other states, the MVD has a link on their website that directs you to a document called "Medical Reporting Form" which you can fill out and remain anonymous. This application states, "Any physician, person or agency having knowledge of any licensed driver's or applicant's mental or physical disability to drive . . . is authorized to report such knowledge to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles."

Next the person in question will receive an appointment in the mail to take an On Road Driving Test (ORDT) which they must pass to maintain their driving privileges. Recent studies report that those with mild cognitive impairment that have failed the ORDT, all consider themselves to be safe drivers.

I will warn you right now that once you embark on this covert operation, everything changes. Suddenly your loved one will have 101

places to go every day. Sadly, this is also a stage where massive depression starts seeping in. But, you can no longer let them behind the wheel and possibly hurt either themselves or others.

A conversation of “Who would you like to have drive you around, when the times comes?” should originate shortly after the diagnosis is made.

It may take a while, but eventually they will accept being chauffeured around.