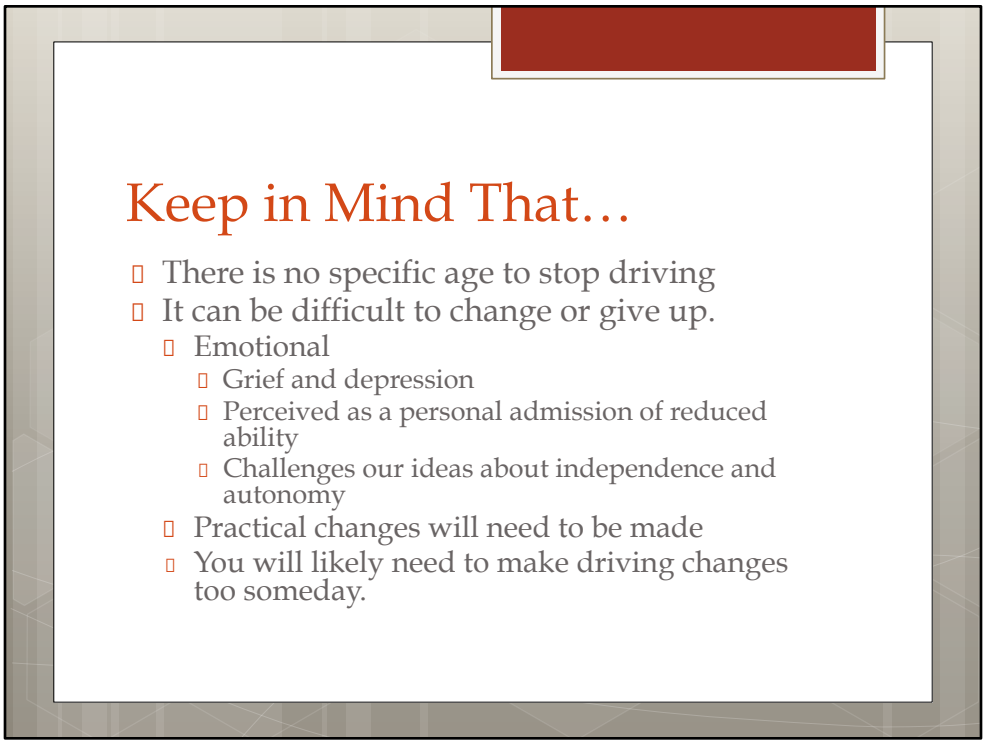
Keeping Safe Behind the Wheel

Seabury Education Series

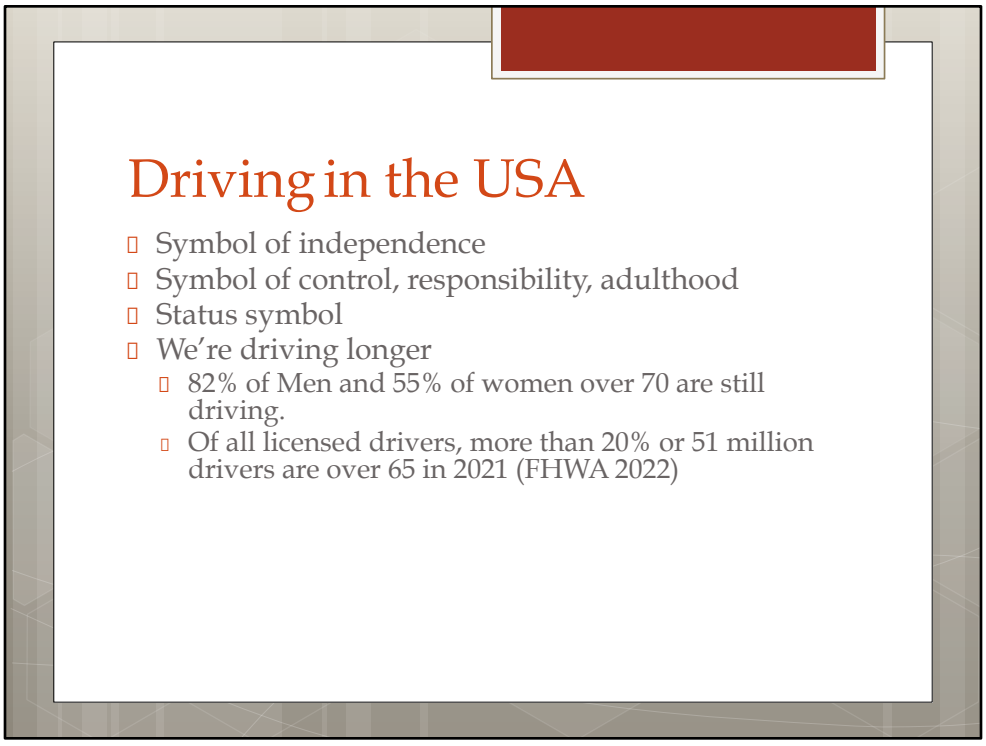
Seabury Resources for Aging®

What brought you here?

- Concerns about driving for yourself or others as we age?
- How we can make adjustments to continue driving as long as possible?
- When should someone you love stop driving?
- How to have the conversation about driving with an older adult?



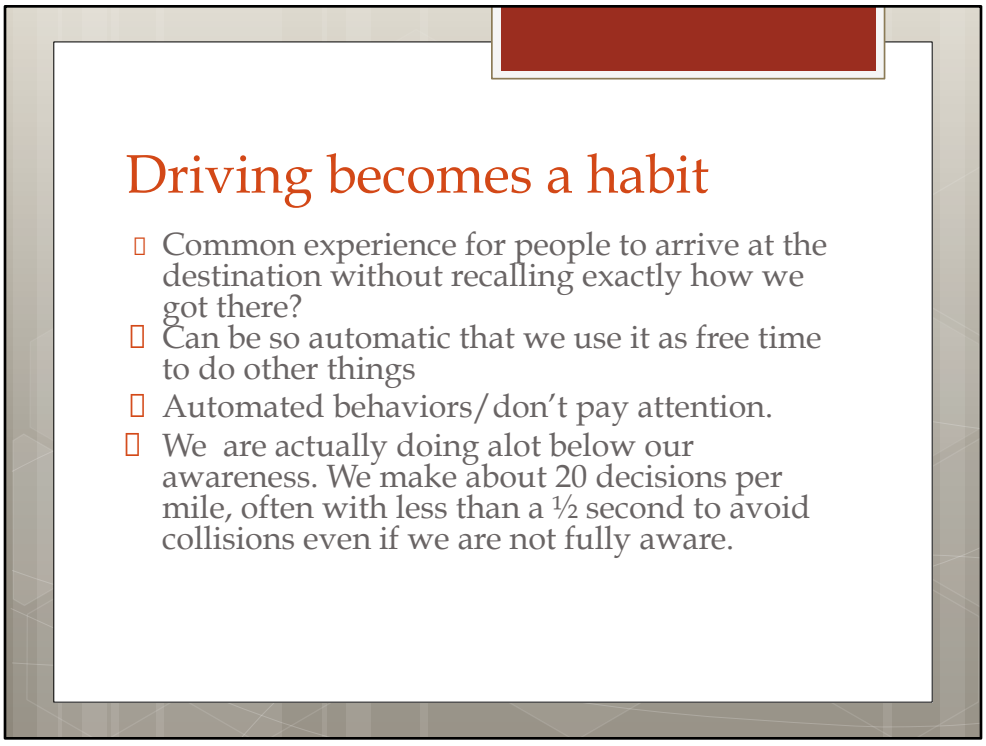
No specific age- we all age differently
Emotionally- it's a loss and it may be grieved as such
perceived as an admission of "guilt"
Practically-



When did you start to drive?
Independence- at 16 we can drive, this happened in the mid to late 1920's, so anyone in their 90s or younger
(Primarily this is a way to identify who should be held responsible. First uniform vehicle code in 1926 recommended all at age 16, though many can get a permit earlier. – *Insurance Institute for Hwy Safety, "Why 16?"*
It's still a state function to license drivers
Keep in mind that some people learned to drive on farms, or out in the country. Even my nephews, who are not yet 16 have driven ATVs etc.
Status symbol- cars are a symbol of status and influence. We rent limos on prom night, weddings, etc. Young boys, especially some of my client dreamed of a car. Not all families had cars.
Transportation is a huge issue. Especially for people living away from the city. It's also an issue b/c in wealthier areas there may not be public transportation.

Why do we drive?

- Keeps us connected socially
- Getting to:
  - Work
  - Shopping
  - Medical appointment
  - Recreation and Fun Events
  - Errands
- Transportation is a huge issue for older adults that can't drive. Alternatives are less desirable and flexible.
- Suburbs and Rural areas built for car drivers but this is changing.

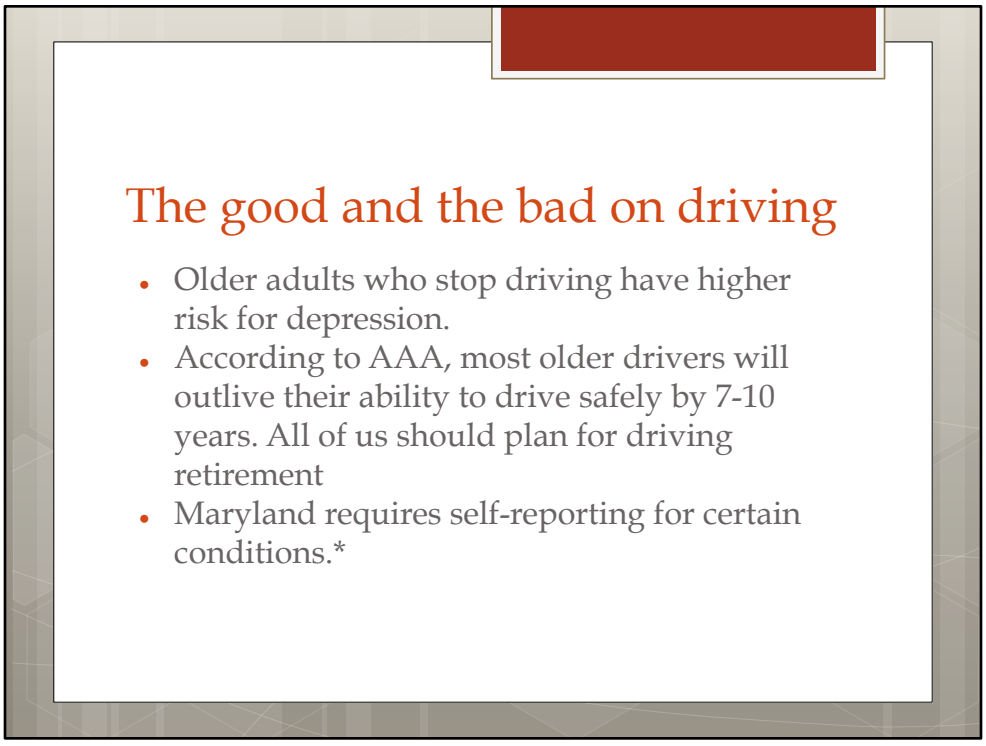


- Easy to get into routine and not pay attention. For example, stop signs along my road with one stoplight that I've watched people treat like a stop sign.
- It's so easy that some of us make phone calls and text because we view it as "free time".

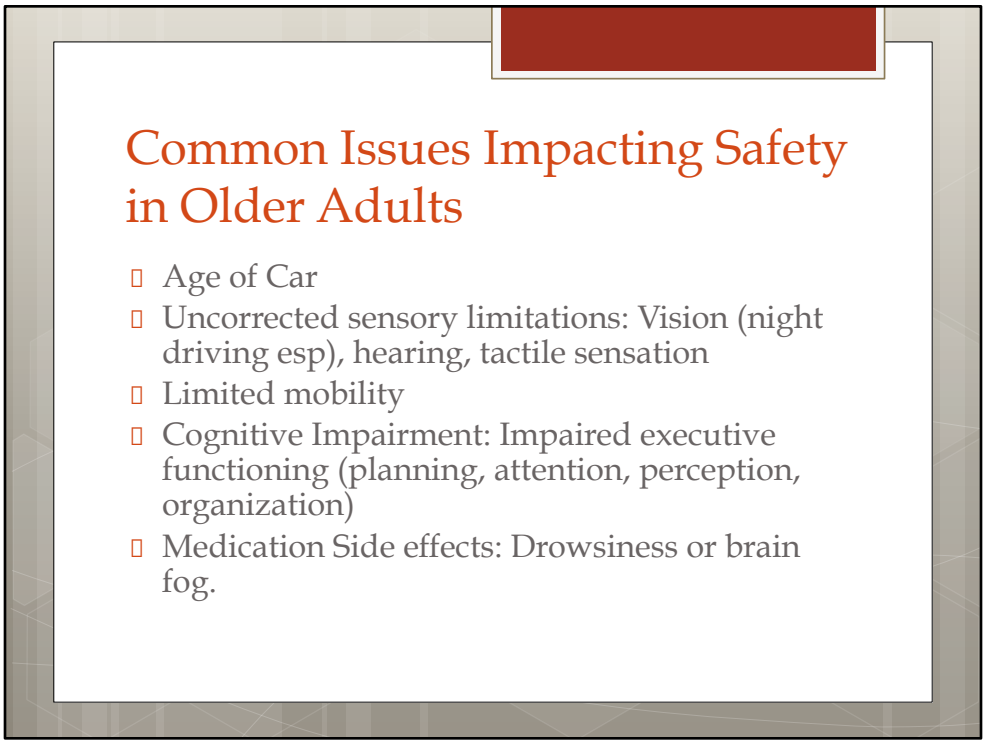
Complexity of Driving

- Ongoing need to pay attention to multiple stimuli, visual, auditory, sensory.
- Prioritizing in the moment. Snap decisions
- Guessing and anticipating what other drivers may do and practicing defensive driving.
- Recalling steps to get to destination
- Quick reflexes (pushing brakes/gas)
- Dealing with unexpected (closed roads/weather conditions, power outage) etc)
- Comparing present with past experiences.

National Safety Council
https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/motor-vehicle/road-users/older-drivers/?_gl=1*4i77v3*_up*MQ..*_gs*MQ..&gclid=Cj0KCQiAz6q-BhCfARIsAOezPxkvSWzeuR7fsKhCkFxCxJEY8jwnQ8UkBzRREG6_u9WpCJRo9ThSfiEaAhcREALw_wcB



List of reportable disorders: Diabetes, epilepsy, seizure, heart conditions, stroke/TIA, blackout/dizziness, TBI, Sleep disorder, loss of limb, dementia, Parkinson's, Schizophrenia, Alc/Subst Abuse Disorders, Corrected visual acuity worse than 20/70, Field of vision less than 110 degrees. Source: MD MVA



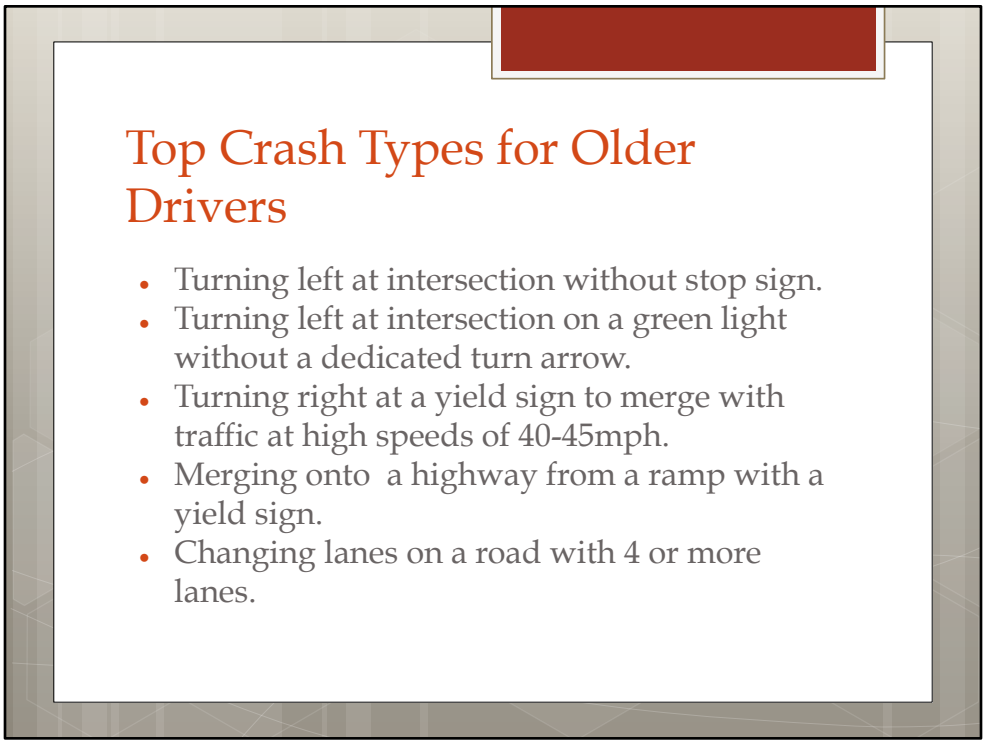
- Medications may make you foggy or tired, check with doctor and pharmacist if there are interactions and if you should be driving
- Vision- need more light (this doubles every 13 years), sight changes slowly, field of vision narrows with age (85% of our information comes in visually), more difficult to pick out one color or one item in the business of the streets, SUVs blind us with the level of their lights. Depth perception deteriorates and this usually helps us pick out how fast someone is coming.
- Hearing- not being able to hear a horn or a emergency vehicle siren, distinguish sounds, (the tones of these tend to fall within the hearing loss array.)
- Reaction times slow due to arthritis, old injuries, pain,
- Dementia slows down the time it takes to process information

Common issues impacting safety in Older Adults

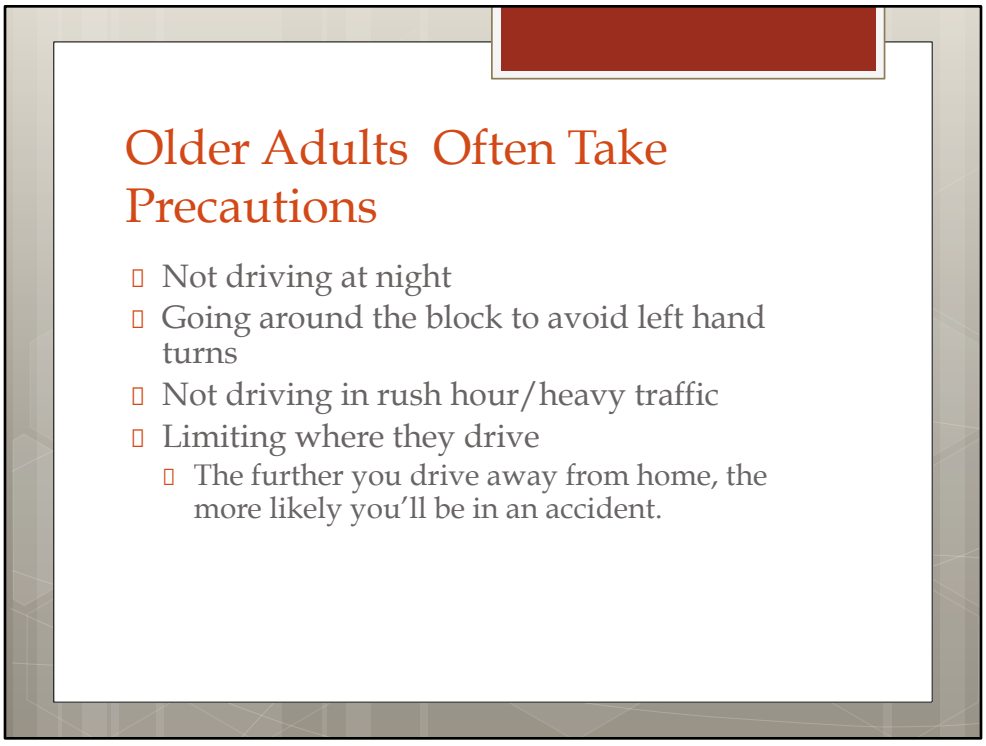
- Memory (especially with new info)
- Difficulty prioritizing or splitting attention.
- Difficulty doing more than one thing at a time.
- Slower processing speed and reflexes.
- Stiffness or functional impairments.
- Variable or unpredictable alertness due to sleep problems or meds.

What makes you nervous?

- Left hand turns
- Roundabouts
- Big trucks
- Nighttime or stormy driving
- Who has right of way
- Backing up and parking in crowded lot
- Passing other cars
- Aggressive Drivers
- Motorcycles/bikes/scooters



Source: NHTSA as shared in MDOT Training 2017



CDC: Of the current drivers, about 57% of men and 81% of women reported that they avoided driving under certain conditions. Respondents most commonly limited their driving at night and in bad weather. One-third of older men and two-thirds of older women stated that they avoided driving under each of these conditions. Only 9% of older men, but 34% of older women, reported avoiding driving on highways or high-speed roads.

A third of older men and 44% of older women reported avoiding driving in heavy traffic.

About 10% of older men and 15% of older women reported cutting back on driving due to a physical problem in the last year.

Of those that cut back on driving due to physical problem, 40% cited vision-related issues as a reason.

Maintaining Driving Health

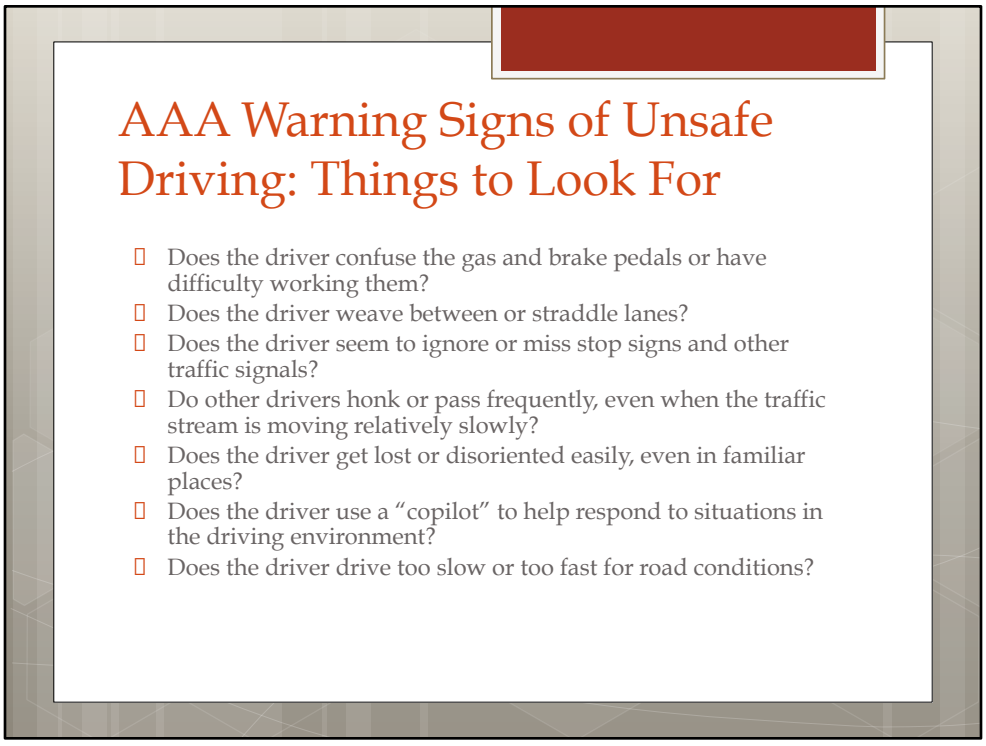
- Maintain physical, vision, hearing with healthy habits, diet, exercise and check ups.
- Modify driving to reduce risks as you go.
- Reflect on self and ask others about your safety. Have you had tickets, got lost, fender benders or near misses?
- Bring it up with your eye doctor, primary care, neurologist and other providers.
- Limit distractions, drive slower, allow for more time, use caution in higher risk sit.

AARP 10 Signs Driver Unsafe

- Almost crashing, with frequent "close calls"
- Finding dents and scrapes on the car, on fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs, etc.
- Getting lost, especially in familiar locations
- Having trouble seeing or following traffic signals, road signs, and pavement markings
- Responding more slowly to unexpected situations, or having trouble moving their foot from the gas to the brake pedal; confusing the two pedals

AARP 10 Signs Driver Unsafe

- Misjudging gaps in traffic at intersections and on highway entrance and exit ramps
- Experiencing road rage or causing other drivers to honk or complain
- Easily becoming distracted or having difficulty concentrating while driving
- Having a hard time turning around to check the rear view while backing up or changing lanes
- Receiving multiple traffic tickets or "warnings" from law enforcement officers



https://ewcstatic.thehartford.com/thehartford/the_hartford/files/CMME/crossroads-worksheet-warning-signs.pdf Driver warnings worksheet

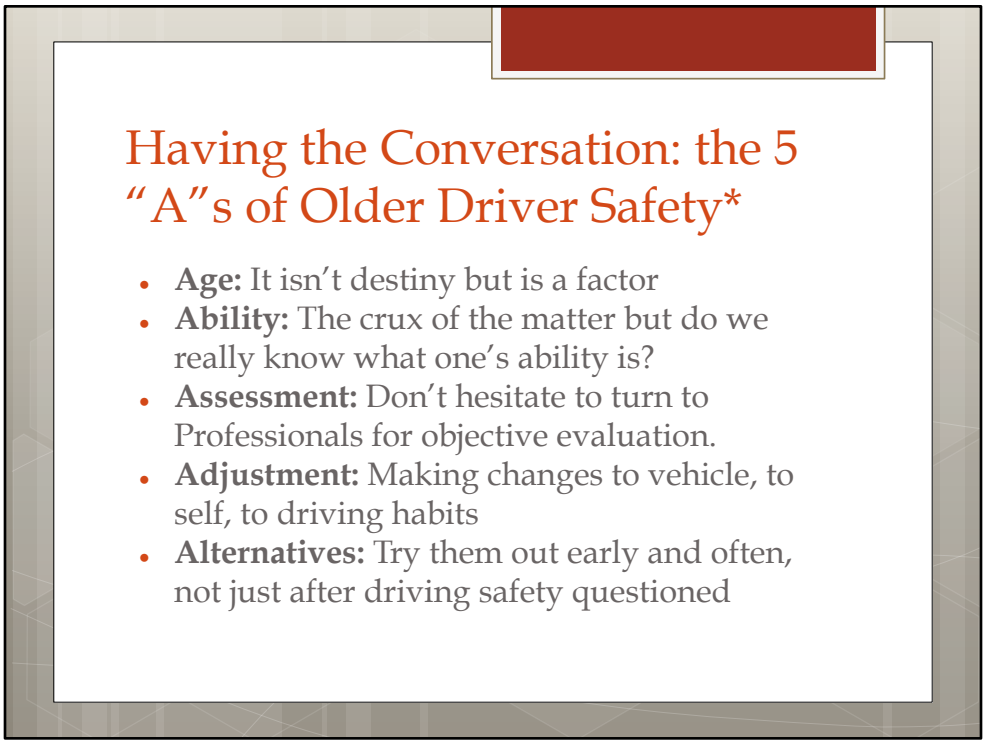
Warning Signs of Unsafe Driving

Making Adjustments

- Waits too long to turn.
- Infrequent hitting curb or forgetting blinker.
- Lost or nervous in new places

Stopping Driving

- Confuses brake and gas.
- Impaired consciousness.
- Getting lost familiar places
- Can't see well
- Immediate stop on road when confused



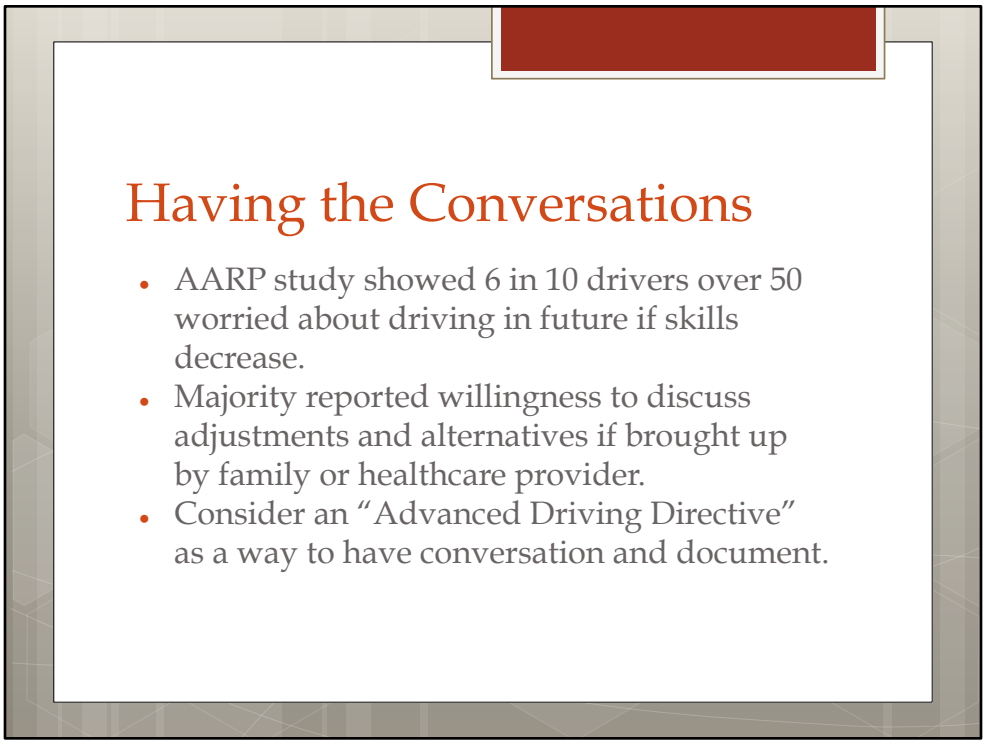
From MDOT training 12/7/2017

Having the Conversations: Reasons we Avoid

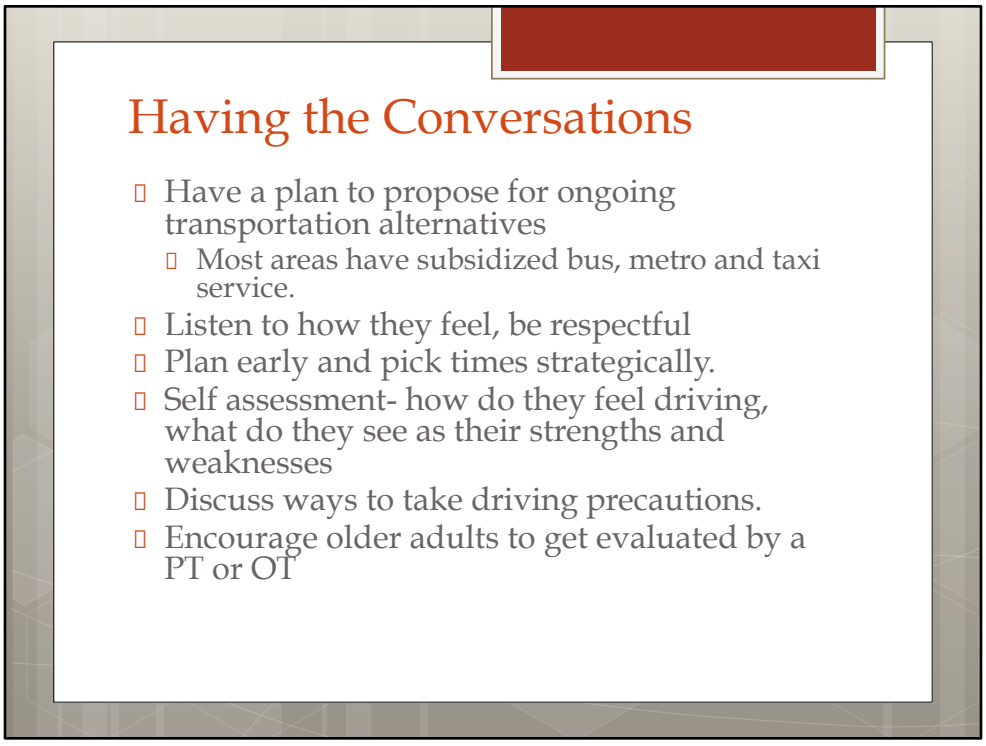
- Don't know how the older driver will react.
- Don't know how your life will be impacted if older driver gives up driving.
- Don't know if you will be effective.
- Uncertain if there's truly a problem.
- Busy lives
- Don't know what to say or when to say it.
- Don't want to cause them distress or challenge their authority.

Having the Conversations

- Know this is tough to talk about. Usually not received well. Perceived as a threat to autonomy and mortality.
- Talk long before it's a problem or after a life change or incident that occurred.
- Don't talk at family event or large gathering or right when there's a crisis.
- Maintain positive optimistic attitude and acknowledge feelings. Limit conveying worry. Focus on goal
- Review and provide research and common risks



https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/livable-communities/transportation/advance-driving-directives/



Do not become defensive. Be a good listener and let the older adult express any feelings and emotions. This may help you to understand how and why the conversation has been upsetting.

Respond with empathetic phrases. State, "I understand how this is upsetting," or, "Let's focus on what we can do to help keep you safe without limiting when and where you want to go."

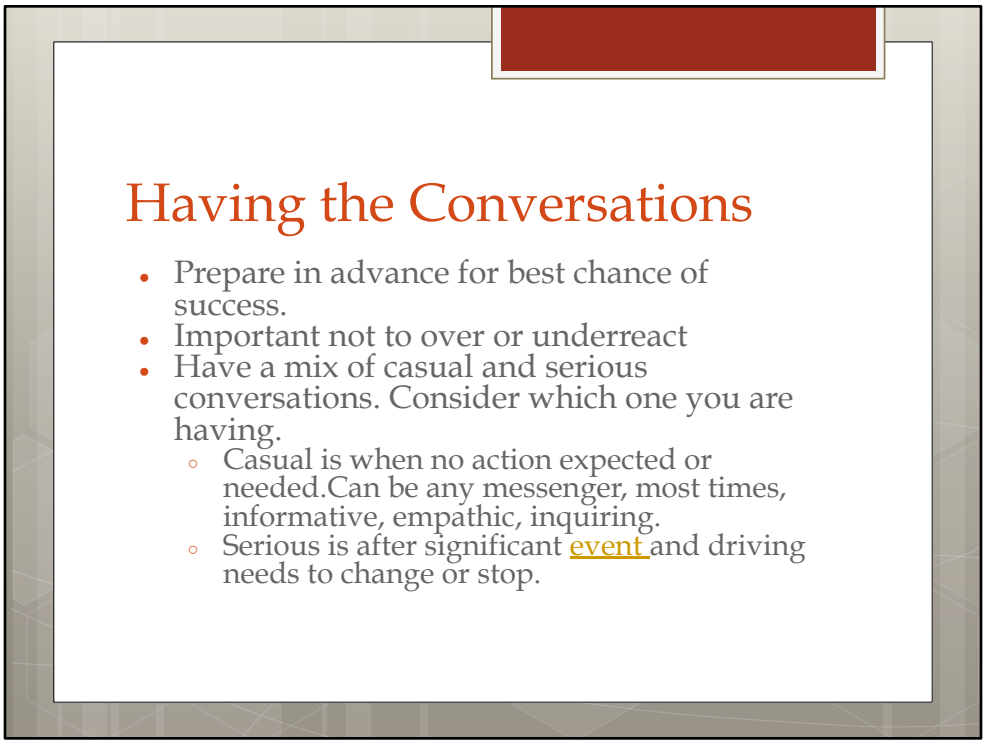
Do not lecture or demand that an older adult give up the keys. The more you alienate your listener, the less you will be able to help.

Be objective. Encourage the older adult to check skills and abilities needed for safe driving by taking a self-rating program or getting an assessment from a professional.

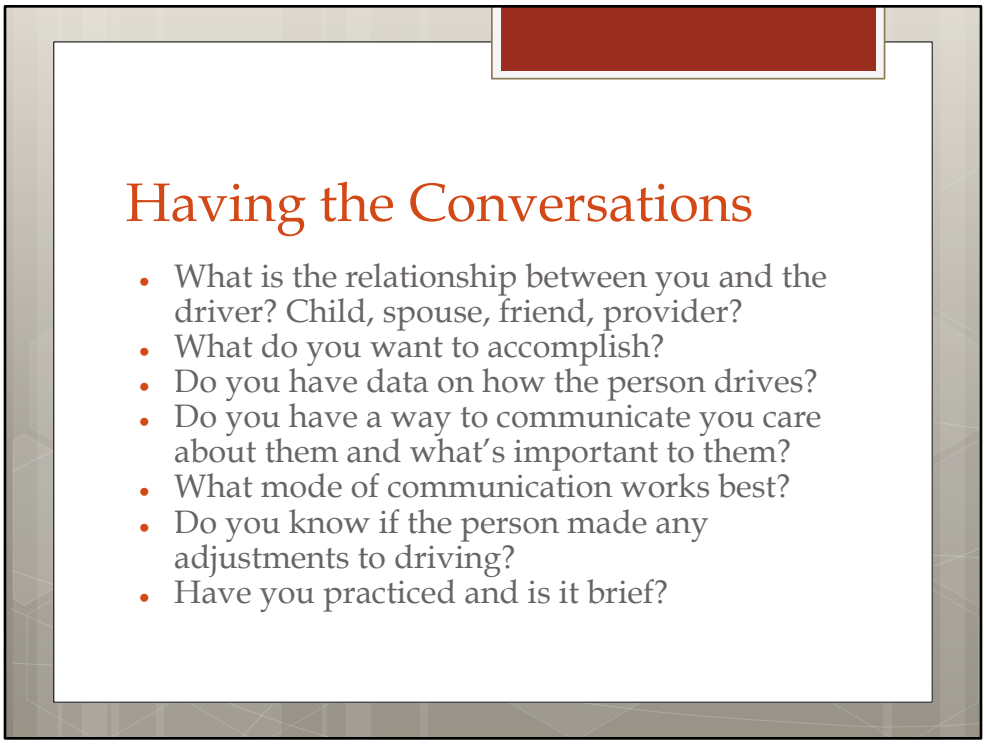
Work together to agree on a plan of action. If you initiate the conversation early – before any problems exist – the transition from driver to passenger can be very gradual. It might begin with self-imposed restrictions on when or where the older adult chooses to drive. It may progress to building up a comfort level in using other forms of transportation before there's a need to depend on them. This plan also could provide enough time to move the older adult's residence, so there would be a very limited need to drive at all in the future.

Having the Conversations

- Consider it multiple conversations over time.
- See if there are ways to gain consensus on giving up driving when unsafe
- The messenger and timing matter.
- Involve medical or other providers.



From Hartford
https://ewcstatic.thehartford.com/thehartford/the_hartford/files/CMME/crossroads kit-all-sessions.pdf
Significant event=change in function, change in meds intermittently or perm impacting function, getting lost, accident, multiple near misses, tickets or issuance from MVA.



https://ewcstatic.thehartford.com/thehartford/the_hartford/files/CMME/crossroads kit-all-sessions.pdf

Having the Conversations

- Discuss plans on how to get places important to them that is flexible and reliant on multiple alternatives.
- Discuss short term and long term financial trade offs owning a car versus other modes.
- Don't take response personally. Try to keep old hurts from entering conversations. Focus on showing support and empathy while also moving towards safe changes.
- If a messenger can't be found, could involve MVA or providers.

Having the Conversations Starter Phrases

- I've noticed [unsafe driving observations over time]. Have you noticed that?
- You always said better safe than sorry and I'm concerned these things aren't safe. I know you'd feel awful if someone was hurt when you were driving and that's why I bring it up.
- You have this [event or change] and I care about you. I know how important your independence is and I respect that. What thoughts do you have about driving now that this happened?
- I heard [related story]. Wait for comment

Having the Conversations

- How would you get to [place] if couldn't drive or car breaks down?
- It is hard for me to be the messenger here but I care about you so much that I don't want it to come from a stranger or someone who doesn't care. I get that you're angry and I'd probably be too. *Stop talking. take break as needed.*
- Are there some changes that can help you stay safe while driving? Would you like some info on what's worked with others?

Having the Conversations

- Would you be willing to try this other transportation for a __ day(s) and we can test it out?
- How was [grandparent or other loved one] when they started to have trouble driving? How did they adjust?
- I was nervous to bring this up and appreciate you talking about it.
- When you altered your driving, how did that go? (i.e. stopping night driving)

Having the Conversations

- Generally, older adults do better if it isn't made to be a permanent decision they make to stop driving, even if their behaviors change and they stop driving.
  - More important unsafe drivers stop even if their language doesn't match their behavior.
- Sometimes necessary to remove car because safety risk too high and person won't stop driving. Know it's not your fault and keep moving to maintain relationship.

If you are concerned

- Consult with driver
- Ask doctor to write “no driving” Rx
- Find ways to remove car that might be positive i.e. giving to grandchild or charity.
- Send car for repairs or disable.
- Ask doctor to report to DMV/MVA.
- Offer support with alternative transport options

What the DMV Requires: Driving is a Privilege, Not a Right

- Va: at age 80 + must renew your license in person. If license is expired they may make you take the vision, driving or written test. Report unsafe driving and ask to do a medical review.
- Md: they ask for a self report of many conditions , also you can report an unsafe driver, however, they will send out the forms for self report. Eyesight checked after 70.
- DC: at 70+ they will ask you to come in, in person to renew your license. Report that someone should be retested

Report to Md Immediately
Cerebral palsy;
Diabetes requiring insulin;
Epilepsy;
Multiple sclerosis;
Muscular dystrophy;
Irregular heart rhythm or heart condition;
Stroke, ministroke, or transient ischemic attack (TIA);
Alcohol dependence or abuse;
Drug or substance dependence or abuse;
Loss of limb or limbs;
Traumatic brain injury;
Bipolar disorder;
Schizophrenic disorders;
Panic attack disorder;
Impaired or loss of consciousness, fainting, blackout, or seizure;
Disorder which prevents a corrected minimum visual acuity of 20/70 in each eye and a field of vision of at least 110 degrees;
Parkinson's disease;
Dementia, for example, Alzheimer's disease or multi-infarct dementia;

Sleep disorders, for example, narcolepsy or sleep apnea; or
Autism.

Resources

- AAA, AOTA, AARP have information about safe driving. Especially if you're concerned about yourself.
  - Car Fit from AOTA
  - http://seniordriving.aaa.com
  - http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/transportation/we_need_to_talk/ (Seminar created by Hartford Ins and MIT)
  - Dementia and Driving Alzheimer's Assocation
  - www.driver-ed.org: information on rehab specialists
  - www.nrhrehab.org: a rehab site
  - Driver Concerns Checklist

Transportation Resources

- Ride Share
- Subsidized cabs
- Apps
- Friends, Family and Neighbors
- JCA Connect a Ride
- MetroAccess
- Senior Villages
- Senior Connection (MoCo)
- NaborForce and other services
- Private Aides

Thank You

Michelle McGrath, LCSW-C, LICSW
Seabury Care Management
202-364-0020
mmcgrath@seaburyresources.org
seaburycaremanagement.org