Knowing Your Limits Conversation Guide

First, set the stage for a constructive, non-confrontational conversation. Don’t surprise the senior with the conversation – let them know in advance that you think it’s a discussion you should have. Reassure them that the discussion is not going to be about stopping driving, but about finding ways to ensure they are driving safely. And make it a one-on-one private conversation: including more people can more easily lead to confrontation and defensiveness.

- Talk openly about the effects of aging on driving, and why it is important to discuss this topic regularly to ensure that the senior driver is continuing to drive safely.

- Discuss whether the senior has any concerns with their driving ability. Whether they answer yes or no, suggest that you take the time (perhaps at a future date) to assess their driving skills, so that you can pinpoint areas that they can try to improve in order to drive more safely.

- If you have concerns based on observation – it’s important that this is fact-based and that you provide specific examples – let them know, while reassuring them that you can help them to find solutions for many driving skills issues. This should be as non-confrontational as possible.

- Suggest that the senior driver take steps to maintain their driving skills. Offer to partner with them in ensuring that their car fits them properly, and in reviewing driving skills information.

- If warranted, talk about the fact that the senior should consider self-restricting their driving, by not driving at night, not driving long distances, or not driving on busy highways.
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- Agree on a course of action for the future: annual conversations, regular assessment of skills, and annual eye exams are just some of the things you can agree to do.

- Assure the senior driver that you will work together to maintain their independence as long as possible, and that once driving must be restricted, you’ll help them find alternative transportation.

- If you feel they are driving unsafely – address it. The consequences of not taking preventative steps are simply too great.

- Ensure that you discuss the fact that there are responsibilities for both of you: the senior driver has to be realistic about their driving skills, and take whatever steps are necessary to continue driving safely; you have a responsibility to support them in maintaining their independence.

Before you end the discussion, set a date to talk about this subject again. If you are having difficulty having this conversation at all, consider talking to a physician for advice and support.