

My Car Keys are Gone! Now What?

By Laura Enslen, LSW



The Loss of Freedom (aka Driving)

I was discussing a family member's care needs after a fall and broken hip, and both of us in the conversation came to the harsh reality that it would be some time until our loved one was able to drive again. There are those to whom this does not affect in a dramatic way, but to others this is a large limitation. My loved one falls into the later. He enjoys driving and visiting family and friends with this freedom. He and his spouse travel often a few hours in either direction of their home to make events of their children and grandchildren. For years they have taken driving vacations across the nation and to Canada. This is a great loss, even for a short time. So how about your loved ones? Where do they fall on the spectrum? And how are they coping with this loss?

Isolation

My loved one will, with great care and therapy, be able to drive again. However, for those without that hope, withdrawing from life can begin to happen. Planning trips and asking for rides can become overwhelming and exhausting. So they may opt to miss lunch dates with friends, coffee with "the guys" in the morning, and family meals. Many older adults already feel like a burden to their families. Acknowledging these feelings as a caregiver and offering solutions can help your loved one open up about feelings of loss and isolation.

The Good News

For some the loss of driving is only for a short time. They may be laid up with recovery from a fall, surgery or treatment. Therapies and doctors' appointments make up most of the time they would have been enjoying other activities anyway. For many older adults in this current generation, women did not drive often, and so if there is someone still available to do the driving, this may not be a great loss for those women. But for those who are affected greatly, there are resources in each community to acknowledge and meet the need for transportation. Sandra Ray, a staff writer at Today's Caregiver and caregiver.com writes the following in her article titled "Driving: When Aging Illness Makes it Difficult":

"If the decision is made for someone to stop driving, it helps to ease their anxiety that transportation could be readily available. These arrangements could be made within the family or caregiver circle or by researching available transportation in the community. Some ideas for transportation include:

1. Selling the family vehicle and setting aside those funds to pay for public or private transportation.
2. Rotating a schedule with family members or friends to provide ongoing transportation.

3. Qualifying for special transportation in the community based on medical need, especially for medical appointments. (For starting points on where to find these programs, visit www.211.org.)
4. If public transportation is available, most communities have para-transit options available for those who are unable to walk to community bus stops. Applications need to be signed by a physician or a social worker documenting that the person needs door-to-door service.
5. Joining an existing neighborhood carpool or vanpool service.
6. Senior centers may provide transportation directly to and from programs on a regular basis. Additional trips may be available as needed or as scheduled; some fees could apply.

These are only a few of the many alternate transportation methods that are available.”

Communication

Knowing the resources can certainly help to problem solve those transportation needs, but offering a listening ear and supportive presence, can sometimes mean the most. Older adults are experiencing losses sometimes weekly if not daily. Acknowledging the limits that losing a license can bring can help open the door to a continued full life for your loved one.

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