

Supporting senior drivers

A guide for whānau and friends of senior drivers



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NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

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Supporting the senior drivers in your life

Nau mai, haere mai - welcome to this resource on how to support senior drivers.

Senior drivers may have many people in their lives and communities who love and respect them. This could include children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, siblings, friends, and members of their church, hapū, or iwi.

This booklet is for people who're looking to support a driver over 60. Whether this group is large or whether it's one or 2 people, this booklet can help you and your friend or relative navigate driving safely as a senior, including knowing when to stop driving.



I'm a bit worried about how many scratches my brother Tere is getting on his car these days. How do we talk to him about it?

Have you had any thoughts or conversations like these? You're not alone. This booklet will help you begin to answer these questions and more. Knowing what to be aware of can help you support the older people in your life to drive safely. It can also help you and them create supports for a life without driving.

How will we cope if Nana can't drive anymore? We need her help with the kids.

Uncle Ken's getting older - I wonder if he still feels confident driving? When does he need to renew his licence?

Did that health scare affect Mum's ability to drive? What about the medications she's on now? Should we be worried?



Starting the conversation



Start talking before you're worried

People are living longer and driving longer than ever before. Better medical care and technology is part of this. It's very possible for senior drivers to drive safely for many years.

If possible, it's best to have a chat with your senior friend or relative before you have any concerns about their driving. Everyone's body and mind changes as we age. Being prepared gives you time to adjust. Talking about it ahead of time will make sure you all know what to look out for, and what options you have to make changes.

Tips for preparing for the conversation

- Always remember that this can be a scary topic for people. Stay positive and respectful, and try to imagine how they might be feeling.
- It might be best to have one person talk to your friend or relative first. A one-on-one conversation with someone they trust may be more likely to result in positive change.
- Ask first. For example, 'I'd like us to have a chat about driving, and how you're feeling about it. Would that be ok? When would be good for you?'
- Pick a calm and quiet time and place. Even if someone has seen something concerning, don't start a big discussion without thinking about it first. Don't start the conversation while driving.
- Know what you want to say. Focus specifically on what you're worried about, and try to describe it without judgement.
- Do some research into options. You may want to look into safe driving courses in your area, or public transport services.

Renewing licences

When a person turns 75, they need to renew their licence more often. They also need a medical check to renew their licence. They'll get a letter or email to tell them they need to do this – at 75, 80, and every two years after that.

This can be a good opportunity to start a conversation about driving safely as a senior. They will need an appointment with their doctor to get the medical check – you may want to suggest that someone goes along as a support person. After the appointment, your senior friend or relative will be given one of the following results:

Medically fit to drive

You're able to drive safely in all conditions.

Medically fit to drive with conditions

You're able to drive safely, but only if you do or don't do specific things. For example, NZTA may require that you wear glasses or not drive at night.

Medically fit to drive if a specialist agrees

You need to see a specialist for more testing. Your doctor will tell you what kind of specialist. It could be an optometrist to test your eyes, or an occupational therapist to check you can safely cope with complex driving situations. If you pass, you're able to drive safely and can renew your licence.

Medically fit to drive if you pass an on-road safety test

Your doctor may ask you to do a driving test in a car with a testing officer. You can book this test at a driver licensing agent. If you pass, you're able to drive safely and can renew your licence. You can take the test more than once.

You can renew your licence at a driver licensing agent

Not fit to drive

You're not able to keep yourself and others safe when driving. You can't renew your licence and in some circumstances NZTA will be advised of this.

Not being able to renew your licence can be upsetting. Take some time to process this news. Later in this resource we look at how to live your life fully without driving.

It's no longer safe or legal for you to drive

Having the conversation

Consider relationships first

Everyone is human, and we hear things differently from different people. You may want to connect as the group of people who cares about your senior friend or relative, and think about who's the right person to talk to them about driving. Consider how others can support that person to have the conversation.

If you're the one having the conversation, make sure your relationship is in a good place first. Have you seen your friend or relative lately and asked them how they're doing in general? Try to connect with the person outside of the conversation about driving first.



What to talk about

There are lots of parts to a conversation about continuing to drive safely as a senior. It might be good to start with just one and have a few conversations over time.

Some topics you might want to address are:

- **Health.** How is their health in general? Is there anything they're worried about? Do they know what effects their medication can have on their driving? What activities do they do to stay fit in mind and body?
- **Responsibilities.** Are there things they feel other people rely on them for that they need to be able to drive? For example, they may still be working, or be committed to picking up their grandkids from school.
- **Alternative options.** What public transport or ride-share services are available in your area? How could you or others provide support or offer other ways for your senior friend or relative to keep up with their responsibilities, or share those responsibilities?

Tips for having the conversation

- **Keep in mind that your senior friend or relative may be upset by the conversation or become defensive.** Listen to what they have to say and how they feel, and acknowledge them. Let them know how much you value and respect them.
- **Ask questions first.** Listen to what they say and respond before bringing up your concerns.
- **Use open questions that begin with 'What' and 'How'.** Avoid questions that start with 'Why' as they can feel like an attack. Here are some good examples: 'How do you feel about driving at the moment?' 'What do you think you need to keep driving safely?'
- **Keep the focus on safety.** Tell them you want to make sure that they and everyone else have the best chance to stay safe on the roads.
- **Avoid arguments.** They aren't likely to result in positive change. If things get heated, take some time and space and return to the conversation another day.

What to look out for

You might notice changes in your senior friend or relative. Let's look at which changes you should worry about straight away, and which can be a more long-term conversation.

Worrying changes

These are changes you should talk to your senior friend or relative about as soon as possible. For example:

- getting lost in places the driver knows well
- failing to stop at a stop sign or red light
- mixing up the brake and accelerator pedals
- stopping in traffic for no apparent reason.

Other changes

These are changes it would be good to address, but aren't as urgent. For example:

- not feeling confident about driving
- finding it hard to turn around to see when reversing
- being distracted easily
- getting honked at frequently
- scratches or dents on your friend or relative's car, letterbox, fence, or garage, caused by driving
- getting easily irritated or upset when driving
- driving too fast or too slow for the conditions
- failing to spot hazards (such as a pedestrian running out onto the road)
- relying on a passenger to give them instructions when they're driving
- drifting out of their lane
- getting a speeding ticket
- involvement in a crash or a near miss.





Health and medication changes

As we age, we may need to take more medications. Medications can be important to our health and quality of life. They may also affect our driving, changing how well we can see, hear, process information, or even stay awake.

It's illegal to drive while impaired by medications. If you drink alcohol while you are on medication, it can change the way the medication affects you.

If you know your senior friend or relative has changed their medication lately, check if they are aware of all the effects. They should discuss them with their doctor if they haven't already - you may like to offer to go with them as a support person.

Ongoing concerns

Sometimes you and your senior friend or relative won't feel the same about their driving. If you're really worried about their driving but they say they're fine, what should you do?

This is a difficult situation. There are a few things you can try:

- **Keep things calm and positive.** Remember, you may need to have more than one conversation about this. Try to keep talking about this issue over time, and listen to what they have to say.
- **Ask about the future.** What do they think might happen if the things you're concerned about continue to happen?
- **Check in with a doctor.** Ask your senior friend or relative to check in with their doctor, just in case. You can also independently contact a health care professional at the local health centre to discuss your concerns.
- **See if someone else can help.** Maybe another person can have a similar conversation with your senior friend or relative.
- **If you have immediate safety concerns about their driving, call *555 or 111 in an emergency.** This is if your senior friend or relative is driving right now and you're worried that they are a risk to themselves or someone else.

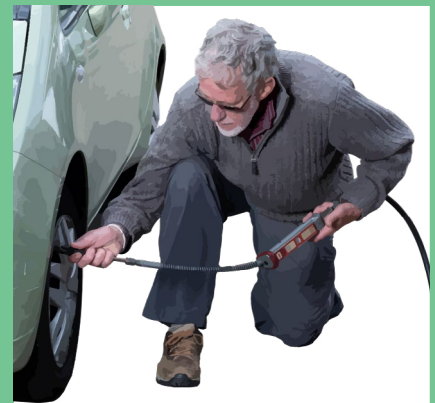


What to do next

After you've talked to your senior friend or relative, there's plenty of practical support and suggestions you can look at together.

Look into alternatives to driving

Walking, public transport, and sharing rides could all be options. As the group who loves and respects your senior friend or relative, what rides or alternative transport can you offer?



Provide practical vehicle support

Having a safe vehicle is a big factor in safe driving. Is there someone in your group who can help with basic vehicle checks and maintenance, like checking oil and water?

Offer an assessment of your senior friend or relative's driving

Choose someone patient and calm to be driven by your senior friend or relative and to give non-judgemental feedback on things they are doing well and things they could work on.

The AA and others also offer professional versions of this.



More information

Visit nzta.govt.nz/senior-drivers to find out how to keep driving safely as you age.

