

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Support Group for Families Dealing with When to Take the Keys Away From Dad and Other Issues

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CONTACT: Danielle Getchman (925) 937-2018

Taking away a right and freedom from our parents, like driving, especially those parents who live in areas where public transportation is limited or inaccessible, sits a little uneasy for most of us. Eldercare Services offers a support group to cope with this and many other dilemmas.

WALNUT CREEK, CA – (JUNE 15, 2010) “Just because I got lost yesterday doesn’t mean I can’t drive anymore”. Bill Hightower has been hearing these words from his dad lately. Bill’s been trying to reason with his father for the last few months to give up driving, with very strong resistance. His father’s condition is worsening; he’s getting lost and confused more frequently. Bill and his father are not alone. According to The Hartford Insurance Company, more than 5 million people in the U.S. are afflicted with Dementia (www.thehartford.com/alzheimers) and many adult children are dealing with the decision to limit or stop their parents from driving.

Eldercare Services announces a support group for families dealing with this and many other family dilemmas. Bill Hightower recently attended this support group and used the very tips offered in this article to successfully remove his father’s keys and ultimately made the road a little safer for the rest of us. “Imagine telling *your* dad, who taught *you* to drive, that he shouldn’t drive anymore and needs to give up the car keys. It’s not an easy task, but sometimes critical”, says Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC. After the age of 75, the risk of driver fatality increases sharply and accounts for 13% of all traffic fatalities and 18% of all pedestrian fatalities (Smart Motorist, 1995).

Taking away a right and freedom from our parents, like driving, especially those parents who live in areas where public transportation is limited or inaccessible, sits a little uneasy for most of us. Those with dementia or other cognitive deficits are usually the most challenging individuals for families and professionals to convince that they can’t drive for safety reasons. The argument is usually, “I’ve been driving safely for 70 years without an accident” or “I taught you to drive; you are not going to tell me what to do.” Even those who haven’t had their license renewed will drive if they have access to their car, forcing families to arrange an intervention, like disabling the car, removing the keys or the car itself.

Ask yourself these questions: If you have a parent (or parents) with mild dementia, have you observed them driving – are they and others safe? Would you allow your young child to ride along as a passenger? Have they ever been lost while driving? Are there scrapes on the car? Have they gotten tickets? If you answered “yes” to any of

these questions, it could be time for an intervention. Below are tips on how to intervene:

- 1) Ask Mom if she'd stop driving because it worries you. If she says no, you can report her to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and they'll begin an investigation. This report can be made by a friend, family member, neighbor or other concerned person and is confidential - the person being reported won't know who did it. The DMV will then test the driver and possibly take the license away.
- 2) If you're a family member, you can help reduce driving episodes by having groceries or prescriptions delivered. You can pick your parent up for medical appointments and make the outing fun with lunch out, or a drive to a favorite shop or park. You could hire a housekeeper/cook who's really a caregiver who can say she or he loves to drive and do all the driving. This intervention is a more natural way of gently reducing the need to drive and eliminating driving without a battle.
- 3) Reasoning is always a challenge with individuals who have a dementia, but you can point out to them how much it costs to keep a car. Expenses of insurance, gas, repairs, licenses versus how easy it would be to call a cab when they want to go out – the cost is usually much lower (depending on the distance).
- 4) If you do need to take those keys, you will probably have to take away the car. Be sure you have the legal authority to do this and let the local police know so when your parents call to report their car stolen, the police will be prepared with a response.

Many older drivers need individually created interventions that respect dignity, keep the elder safe and are within the law. To obtain specific advice on your situation, you can attend the Eldercare Services support group, in either San Francisco or Walnut Creek, or another option is a one-on-one with a Professional Geriatric Care Manager to help you design an intervention that works for your family.

About Eldercare Services: Eldercare Services is a pioneer in a unique delivery of services, providing counseling, geriatric care management, family support groups, classes and Caregiving with offices in Walnut Creek, Marin, Oakland and San Francisco, California. Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC, is the Founder and Executive Director of Eldercare Services and President of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers.

For more advice and tips, visit our blog at www.EldercareAnswers.com/blog and for more information on Eldercare Services, visit www.EldercareAnswers.com.

Contact:

Danielle Getchman, Marketing and Public Relations Coordinator

Eldercare Services

(866) 760-1808

www.EldercareAnswers.com

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