



ADVICE FOR FAMILIES CONCERNED ABOUT AN OLDER DRIVER March 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

Concerned about an older driver becoming more anxious about driving?
Seen more scrapes and dents on their car?
Becoming uncomfortable with them being your children's taxi service?
Are you an older driver's partner and have had scary moments with them at the wheel?

Each family situation is unique in terms of the personalities involved, road safety knowledge, and strategies on how to discuss emotive subjects.

We hope this information is helpful in taking another step forward, wherever you are on your journey.

These notes supplement information at www.olderdriversforum.com which further advice and a webinar and videos:

- ✓ **'Concerned about an older driver? We can help'** Webinar
<https://youtube.com/watch?v=6VAO1ZrQak8&si=EnSlkaIECMiOmarE>
- ✓ **'Still Safe to Drive Video for Family and Friends'**
<https://youtube.com/watch?v=df9WR3T3de4&si=EnSlkaIECMiOmarE>

In planning conversations with an older driver consider the process as three stages:

- ✓ **Who** considers the older driver's personality, and how best to engage with them. Also, who is best equipped in the family or friendship group to lead the conversation
- ✓ **When** looks at conversation timing
- ✓ **What** is the advice and support to keep the older driver driving safely for longer, and how to plan for driving retirement

2. WHO

Professor Musselwhite, chair of psychology at Aberystwyth University, has developed a model that identifies three key older driver personality types.

- ✓ **'Long Term Planners'**. Independent people with strong intellects who enjoy a challenge. Their driving is localised and supports their practical needs. They are triggered to think about fitness to drive and long-term planning following retirement from work. What is helpful for them is in gathering information, as they evolve their driving plan.
- ✓ **'Short Term Supported'**. Social people with most of their high annual mileage devoted to sustaining a busy way of life. Conversations about driving skills and planning for driving retirement are instigated through family and friends, people they trust. They welcome practical and emotional support, every step of the way.
- ✓ **'Reactive'**. Complacent about their declining cognitive and mobility skills they are not aware how these impact ability to drive. They stubbornly continue their way of life. They also have little awareness of how they would carry on their life without a car. Whilst they are resistant to family comments, they will accept professional advice. Or, ultimately, are forced to change by police intervention.

Whilst this model is a generalisation, we hope it is helpful in considering your own situation.

The next part of **Who** concerns the most appropriate person to lead conversations.

- ✓ Consider the personalities involved and experience in discussing challenging topics
- ✓ Some families mistakenly assign the most authoritative person to deliver their concerns as an ultimatum, when a more compassionate, non-judgemental approach is required
- ✓ Hearing sensitive information from the right person will make a big difference. People such as their spouse, adult child, or trusted friend, with the rest of the family having a united front to help the older driver make safe decisions

3. WHEN

Start as soon as possible to normalise road safety as part of day-to-day conversations.

Ways to achieve this are talking about road safety issues relating to the family such as:

- ✓ The grandchildren's latest child seat or concerns about the school run
- ✓ Mentioning the latest police awareness campaign
- ✓ Reviving family history around how relatives reduced, and eventually retired from driving.
- ✓ Draw attention to news about a recent road collision. This is not to scare the older driver but to keep them informed.

All of this will give opportunities for conversations about attitudes and responsibility around safe driving.

If the older driver is causing concerns be prepared that initial conversations might evoke strong emotions, and you will need to persevere to ensure helpful discussions and defuse negative feelings.

It is vitally important not to avoid difficult conversations, to avoid potential tragedies.

4. WHAT

What we focus on here is advice on driving retirement and how to develop an alternative mobility plan to maintain independence.

Most older drivers are highly responsible and want to do 'their bit' to keep the roads safe. In time they may find driving more stressful. Maybe they have scary moments on the roads. This starts to form the picture that it is time for change.

The key elements to minimise stress are planning and timing.

This planning could start when downsizing and ensuring there is a good public service infrastructure where they are moving to.

The next step is to develop a new mobility plan:

- ✓ Make a list of regular journeys, and research and trial how each journey could be made without driving a car
- ✓ Talk to neighbours about a car-sharing Whats App group, with those who have retired from driving contributing to fuel costs in return for an informal taxi service
- ✓ Become familiar with online shopping
- ✓ In terms of funding what is often underestimated is the overall cost of running a car. Retiring from driving is likely to save money for most older drivers
- ✓ Focus on the positives to counter feelings of sadness at this change in life. By giving up driving more time is likely to be spent with family and get out more often
- ✓ Manage a gradual transition from driver to passenger, allowing time to adjust

Free advice in planning this transition is available from the Hubs Mobility Advice service run by Driving Mobility. mobserv@drivingmobility.org

But not all older drivers are so aware; people who Professor Musselwhite identifies as 'Reactive'. With them we need to recognise who they are and request professional intervention:

- ✓ For GPs it is a challenging topic as they have no specific training on this issue. However, the DVLA has published a comprehensive advisory document, and provide specialists that GPs can consult
- ✓ DVLA state it is vital that GPs receive family's evidence about long-term patterns of failing driving skills
- ✓ One option the GP will have is to refer the older driver to Driving Mobility for an assessment
- ✓ Whilst 'Reactive' personalities are reluctant to listen to family advice, they are often receptive to professional advice, and will make their own decision to retire from driving.

Be prepared. You may well have to persevere! What you say or don't say can make the difference between safety or injury – life or death.

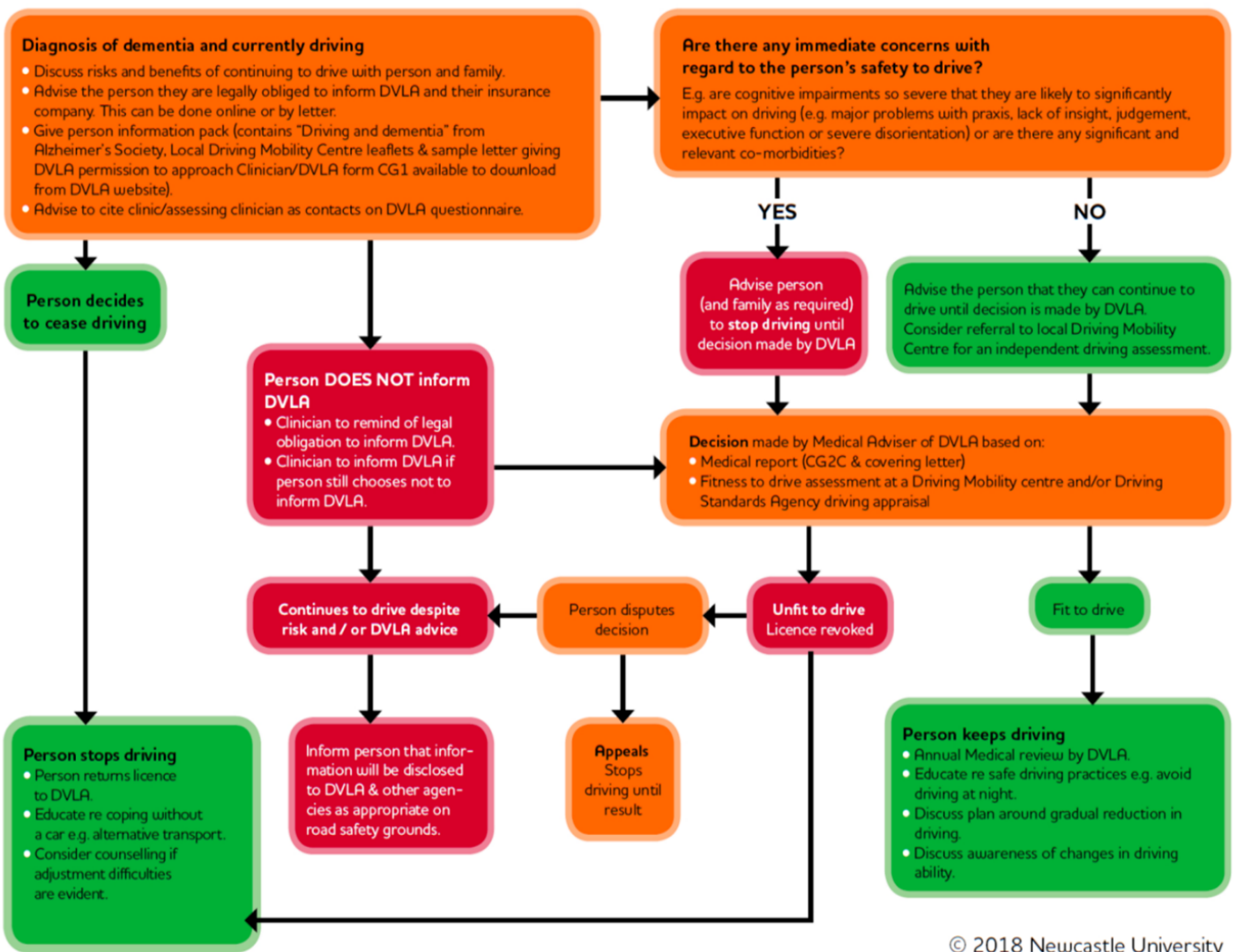
- ✓ Ultimately, if the professional's advice is not heeded, they have a public duty of care to report the matter to the DVLA
- ✓ Family and friends can also notify the DVLA, anonymously. Crimestoppers can also be used to make anonymous reports

The GP's report to the DVLA will start a medical enquiry process as the DVLA will only revoke a licence if there is a medical reason, and not just because a person is a bad driver.

This enquiry could take months, and the older driver could continue to drive when they are not safe to do so.

In that case, and as a last resort, the family may need to take away the keys and remove the car.

Below is a flow chart which sets out the options GPs have concerning intervention.



This document kindly created by Gloucestershire Older Drivers Forum