

Navigating the Driving Dilemma: Strategies for Caregivers of Loved Ones With Dementia

By: [Sally Brewer](#)

While facilitating a monthly circle of support for caregivers, I've noticed one of the most distressing issues they face is the "driving dilemma," meaning their loved one who has been diagnosed with dementia continues to drive a motor vehicle. Some individuals in the early stages of dementia can successfully operate a vehicle. In fact, a diagnosis alone does not automatically lead to losing the capability for long-standing pursuits such as driving. The area of the brain that affects long-term memory is typically the last to deteriorate, so it may be much later in the disease's progression that rote skills noticeably begin to fade. However, even early on, there is an increased risk of accidents or getting lost for individuals with dementia who drive. Nevertheless, the notion of giving up driving and losing this badge of independence will likely generate a whirlwind of pushback and challenging behaviors from your loved one with dementia. It's important to be aware of and proactively plan out this complex and sensitive matter.

The major deficits that impact a person with dementia while driving are typically not seen easily and outwardly with the naked eye. However, with some investigating, you may notice visual-spatial issues, poor peripheral vision, slower reaction times, and general confusion about standard road rules. Perhaps you've even noticed minor dents or scratches on the car. All of these sensory and executive function failures are indicators that you need to implement a strategy. As our elder law team often says, "Not having a plan is a bad plan."

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing the driving and dementia dilemma, but it's crucial to act in a timely manner. If you wait too long to implement your course of action, it may result in devastating legal consequences for you and your family. This underscores the importance of your role as a caregiver in this situation.

As an elder care advocate, I wish you wisdom and courage if you are in this unfortunate position. As a Certified Dementia Practitioner, I suggest implementing the following tactics:

- **Discuss the risks of driving.** It may surprise you that just having a conversation with your loved one about your apprehensions and potential legal threats, along with the impact of shedding a few tears in their presence, may alone compel them to stop driving.
- **Consult with your physician.** Although practitioners commonly prefer to take a back seat to this issue, this may be your first line of defense. At the next appointment, ask the doctor to address the driving issue and insist that the physician (1) address the safety and legal concerns of driving with your loved one and (2) write a prescription for them to cease driving immediately and get a driving evaluation. This way, it removes the burden and associated backlash toward you.
- **Attend a support group.** You can learn many unique techniques from peer caregivers that may align more with your situation. Consider attending my monthly circle of support, the [Northwest Georgia Caregiver Network](#).
- **Consider this tough love idea.** Click [here](#) for a special examination form to complete/return to the Tennessee Department of Safety Driver Improvement. Your loved one will receive a letter from this department outlining implications and testing options. Georgians can request a driver's review by submitting a [Medical Review Process form](#).
- **Get a care manager involved.** We have an awesome team here at Chambliss with years of professional and personal case management experience to provide you with additional insight and to walk this dementia journey alongside you.

If you have any questions or would like additional assistance navigating the dementia-related challenges of a loved one, please contact our team of experienced [estate planning](#) professionals.