



My Dad's girlfriend, Alyce, gave me a call around 8 pm on a Friday night. She mentioned that my Dad was planning to bring dinner over to her place around 6 pm and still had not heard from him. I reassured her saying that he probably got a late start and would be there soon. When Dad didn't pick up my phone call I drove to his house to see what was up. No one was home. No car in the garage. I gave Alyce a call. Still no sign of Dad. It was now 9 pm. I drove to the place he had planned to pick up dinner. No one could describe if they saw him. I scanned the parking lot, drove the path to Alyce's home and then back to Dad's place. Still no sign of him. I held back a panic attack and went out again to search the streets, scanning various parking lots and parked cars. Another hour and a half had passed and I called the police to report Dad as a missing person. Because Dad lived in a smaller town an officer came to his house. "Can you describe him to me?" "Well.....74 year old man, about 5 feet, 11 inches, stocky and bald." The officer politely replied, "Okaayy. Do you know his license plate and make of his car? Have a copy of his driver's license? Current photo? Any identification or emergency contact information in his car? Does he have any distinguishing features or any other behavior or characteristics that might help us pick him out of a crowd or identify him?" I began to feel sick to my stomach. First of all, I didn't know any of this information

and I knew for a fact that there was no emergency contact information on him or in his vehicle. We never thought of doing that. I felt helpless. I told Alyce to stay put at her place because Dad would likely get to her before he'd even think of getting to me. Thankfully, Dad appeared at her doorstep at 3:30 am. It felt like the longest night of my life.

Apparently, Dad picked up a chicken dinner for two and was headed to Alyce's on his familiar route. He entailed a road detour and became completely disoriented. Navigating roads that weren't on his typically beaten path were not part of his current driving habits. The twilight hour along with rush hour traffic brought additional stress and confusion. In his frantic attempt to find his way to Alyce's, Dad got so turned around that he nearly traveled to Wisconsin. When I asked him, "Dad, Why didn't you stop and call me?" He replied, "I was so nervous I couldn't remember anything. None of the roads made sense. I didn't even think or know how to ask for help." This really took me off guard. Dad knew the city better than anyone. He had worked in every neighborhood and knew every back road. He was also a forward observer when he was in the Army and had a natural compass in his head with strong sense of direction. I never expected this to happen. We were all very lucky that night.

Since this incident, I have encountered many people who struggle with knowing how to take action to minimize the

chance of something like this occurring with their elderly parent or significant other. Getting a medical assessment to help rule out a physical or cognitive condition that requires immediate intervention is key. A few tips from those who have been there may provide additional insight that can be of help.



Gather Personal Identification Information

Whether you're advocating for yourself or for someone you love, it's helpful to gather and be able to easily retrieve basic identifying information with emergency contacts. This includes the make, model, year, and color of your loved one's car, their license plate number, and a current photo. As a back up to having this information in your cell phone, keep a paper copy at home and in their wallet or purse and yours. Placing emergency contact information in your loved one's vehicle glove compartment can be an added safeguard. Gently and respectfully including your loved one in the process of collecting information can help you develop a partnership around this sensitive topic. Regardless of your age or capacity to drive, having ready access to identification and emergency information is good practice. We all forget that we readily tag our luggage when we travel so others can locate us easily. We also supply similar information to our kids' schools for their safety and wellbeing. Applying these practices to ourselves and other family members makes sense.

Address Concerns and Explore Resources

It's not uncommon for people to resist or avoid taking action to address concerns about safe driving. This happens for a variety of reasons though oftentimes because people are uncomfortable approaching the subject with their loved one; especially if it's a parent or spouse. Not knowing how day-to-day routines can be handled, particularly when driving's not possible, can be unsettling. Exploring resources before needs for change become urgent can be very helpful. Many people, for instance, do not know that there are Driver's Rehabilitation Specialists who can evaluate one's ability to drive in terms of physical and cognitive functioning. Listings of Driver's Rehabilitation Specialists by state can be found online.¹ Connecting with your physician to discuss

the feasibility of an Driver's Rehabilitation evaluation can help you think through practical solutions and provide reassurance to everyone involved.

If your loved one is no longer able to drive, there are alternatives to you and other family members other than solely relying on being their chauffeur. Some communities may have shuttle services for seniors and accessible public transportation options. The Chicagoland PACE, which is part of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), provides curb to curb transportation throughout Chicago and neighboring suburbs to qualifying applicants.² Taxi vouchers are another source that provides discounted fares for seniors and persons with disabilities to help them get out and about inexpensively.³ Services like Uber and Lyft provide additional sources of help.⁴ Chicagoland "Open Taxi" provides a fleet of accessible taxi's with drivers who are trained and accustomed to transporting people with mobility impairments.⁵ Some communities also have non-profit agencies that provide transportation to medical appointments. One such program, called FISH, operates through Park Ridge's Center of Concern and provides rides to the doctor, dentist, or other health provider, free of charge, for Park Ridge seniors in Maine Township.⁶ Exploring solutions that best fit your family situation and the needs of your loved one can help you be better prepared to develop a plan and better able to respond to change when it's needed.



Be Realistic and Open Minded

Losing the ability to drive and relying on others or new forms of transportation can bring about an array of emotions. Changes in health, mobility, and/or cognition can challenge a person's confidence and motivation to stay engaged in the community and to participate in activities they enjoy. Your loved one may become overly concerned with not wanting to bother others with their transportation needs and slowly become less engaged and active. If they're not accustomed to taking a cab or bus they may become anxious to do something that has not been part of their norm. Taking time to assess the feasibility of using new forms of transportation by going with your loved one for test rides or helping them to practice scheduling and calling for assistance can help ease concerns. It can also provide an opportunity for you to assess and determine practical and realistic solutions.

There may be instances when using a cab or bus service is not the best choice. I've heard of families who thought that a bus or cab would work and discovered that mom or dad needed one to one supervision and support. If this is the case, you might explore hiring a companion through a home care agency to drive or accompany them on errands or appointments. Some communities may have similar types of services through non-profit agencies.⁷ Many families find it helpful to develop a weekly ride schedule to make it easier for people to plan and identify times that can work best to support their loved one's transportation needs. Initially it may feel disruptive to your daily routine



though it can provide ways to ensure time with your loved one and minimize social isolation which can bring about a completely different set of concerns.

Being realistic, open minded, and willing to address transportation needs with a plan to ensure that your loved one can continue to get out and stay connected with others can bring peace of mind and support long-term health and wellness. Being proactive and adopting a "Can-Do" approach helps everyone involved understand and accept this type of change as simply another transition in life. Being mindful of resources and taking time to shift gears in your thinking and behavior is easier than you think.

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Kristine Cichowski provides educational and business consultation to small businesses and non-profit groups to increase efficiency and productivity at home, work, and in the community through her company, Power To Be. Kristine's work is based upon 30 years of experience in patient/family/professional education at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (now known as the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab). Power To Be Empowerment Programs are designed to teach families and individuals how to effectively advocate for their loved one and themselves. To learn more, visit www.powertobe.net or call Kristine at 847.951.3365.



¹ Association for Driver's Rehabilitation Specialists. <http://aded.site-ym.com/>

² PACE ADA Paratransit Service, Illinois. http://www.pacebus.com/sub/paratransit/ADA_guide.asp

³ Taxi Vouchers. <http://peopleof.oureverydaylife.com/taxi-vouchers-6564.html>,
Maine Township. <http://mainetownship.com/>

⁴ Uber. <https://www.uber.com/>, Lyft. <https://www.lyft.com/>

⁵ Open Taxis: Central Dispatch for Chicago Wheelchair Accessible Taxis. <http://opendoorsnfp.org>

⁶ Center for Concern. <http://centerofconcern.org/>

⁷ National Association of Home Care & Hospice, National Agency Locator Service. www.agencylocator.nahc.org, Center for Concern. <http://centerofconcern.org/>, Lincoln Park Village. <http://lincolnparkvillage.org>