

"Oftentimes, you know, the difficult conversation isn't this surface topic, like the driving itself," she says. "It's something underneath it. So, it could be the emotional conversation people aren't having." The child parenting the parent, for example. A sort of pre-grief.

Despite his resistance and bravado, Grandpa is probably afraid, too. After the fender bender, he knows his driving is under a magnifying glass, and his passengers are acting twitchy and pressing down on a nonexistent brake pedal. Research has shown that older people who worry about being judged negatively according to a stereotype - say, that elderly people are bad drivers - may underperform the activity in question. For example, says Crampton, "if you're worrying about remembering something, it can get a lot harder to remember it."

We've been talking openly about how Grandpa is getting too old to drive ever since his last big road trip. (When was it, about four years ago?) Surely that makes him self-conscious. And so does the pressure. Some people have told Grandpa that he's better than any other available driver. And other people have told him that he's more likely to crash than anyone else.

Some of Grandpa's colleagues have reluctantly given up driving. Some waited too long and got in accidents. One woman who worked with Grandpa kept driving well after people told her to give up the keys, and she died behind the wheel, and everyone's been wringing their hands, in anger and regret, over the consequences.

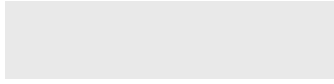
"I don't know that anyone has that self-awareness, when you get to that point where you have to say, 'I'm not as fit as I used to be to do something,'" says Sara Spector, a Midland, Tex., attorney who has handled elder law issues and who took the keys away from her father 15 years ago. "Usually somebody has to come to you and tell you that." But Grandpa doesn't seem to be listening. Everyone's hoping he'll arrive at the same conclusion on his own. Or, as one of Grandpa's friends might say: "He is beloved, he is respected, and people want him to make that decision, not me." Preferably, soon.

Because, quite frankly, Grandpa's been a bit erratic lately. We passengers are in the back seat *completely freaking out* and a big crash is seeming more and more inevitable, as if we're barreling in slow motion toward a semi in the oncoming lane unless someone reaches over and jerks the wheel ...

A car. We're definitely talking about a car, here.

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