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December 2019 Newsletter



What You Need to Know About Older Driver Safety Awareness Week

Older Driver Safety Awareness Week is the first week of this month, and the importance of the annual event goes well-beyond the month of December. The idea behind the campaign is to promote the transportation needs of Older Americans and to help them find safe, secure solutions whether that means driving or not. Without transportation, seniors are often confined to their homes.

Adult children and family members of older adults should try to anticipate driving problems before an accident occurs, and help them establish mobility options when driving is no longer safe. Attending an upcoming doctor's appointment with an elder loved one can shed light on any health-related issues that might negatively impact his or her driving. This can include medications with side-effects, as well as dangerously diminished vision, hearing, and cognitive capabilities.

Short of taking away the keys, adult children can help by making practical adjustments to an elder parent's vehicle. These practical adjustments can include raising the seat high enough for a clear view of the road, keeping windshield wiper blades in proper working condition, and setting headlights to an automatic "on" position. Educating senior parents about safety tips is also important. Consider sharing these tips with them:

(Contd. from Page 1)

- Avoid driving during high traffic periods, like rush hours
- Drive only on familiar streets
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- Stay close to home as much as possible
- Do not drive during rain, fog, or snow
- Never drive when feeling tired, lightheaded, or stressed
- Always wear glasses and hearing aids
- Never use a cell phone while driving

Keep in mind that older adults often feel a sense of loss when they give up driving. Without encouragement and access to transportation, they are at risk of social isolation, depression, and compounding health problems. Seniors may be surprised at the amount of options that exist in their communities, on top of depending on rides from family, friends, and neighbors. Local social programs, places of worship, some businesses, and many other organizations offer transportation services specifically for seniors. Volunteer driver programs, taxi services, and paratransit options are also available in most communities.

Helping seniors secure safe and reliable transportation is what Older Driver Safety Awareness Week is all about. Remember, safety should be something we think about at all times. Do not wait to talk to your loved ones about this very important issue. You may contact us to schedule a meeting with our law firm so we may help you with this or any elder care issue.

The Do's and Don'ts of Visiting an Elderly Parent in a Nursing Home

It's hard to put ourselves in other people's shoes. Teenagers, for example, have no idea what it can be like to be a parent, and most middle-aged parents have no experience with the challenges of elder age. As you can imagine, when it comes to visiting an elder parent in a nursing home, there can be plenty of do's and don'ts that adult children should be aware of, and many of them may come as a surprise.

First, it is important for adult children to plan their nursing home visits in advance. Aging seniors do not have the same energy levels as younger people and interrupting their daily routine can throw them for a loop. Although this may not seem like a big deal, habit often becomes very important to our aging loved ones. Dropping by when it is convenient for you might seem fine, because you know your parents and grandparents would love to see you, but this action may be looking past an elder parent's limits. The solution is to plan ahead and talk to the care team at the facility. Mornings are usually the best time to engage older seniors and setting a reasonable time limit can allow them to stay on track with their regular activities.

Once you plan your visit appropriately, make sure to create the conditions for a successful connection. That may mean calm, accommodating behavior in a setting with limited distractions, as opposed to bringing pets or rowdy kids with high-strung needs. It also may not be a good idea to bring large groups of people, as it may be overwhelming and cause anxiety.



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Bringing a thoughtful gift is a great way to break the ice and spark conversation, but adult children should resist the temptation to bring foods and beverages that are either unhealthy or prohibited. Bringing sweets or sneaking in a favorite food might create short-term enjoyment, but it may not be in his or her best interest. Start first by checking with the nursing home staff and care team so they may answer your questions.

Adult children should similarly refrain from interrupting an elderly parent's activity time, sleep schedule, and meal routine. Outside of unannounced visits, well-meaning adult children can accidentally do this by staying too long. Even if things are going well, extended visits can undermine the care an elder loved one needs. Be mindful of this and plan a return visit.

We know this article may raise more questions than it answers. Do not hesitate to contact our office to schedule a meeting with attorney Alan Hougum on your elder care questions for yourself or your aging loved ones. We are here to support you and your family now, and throughout the year.



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Attorney Alan Hougum and his compassionate team will help you protect yourself and the people you love with strategic planning strategies, such as wills, asset protection and trusts, powers of attorney, estate trusts, elder law planning, Medicaid crisis planning, Medicaid eligibility and application, probate and estate administration, avoiding probate, charitable planning and giving, special needs, and estate tax planning. Hougum Law Firm, LLC, serves the entire Wausau, Wisconsin area.

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305 S. 18th Avenue, Suite 200, Wausau, Wisconsin 54401. Do you have questions you need answered before or after your appointment? Just let us know! Contact us by email at info@hougumlaw.com or call us at 715-843-5001.