DriveAbility – a service provided by
Coastal Occupational Therapy, LLC.

SCRIPTED CONVERSATION GUIDE: DRIVING RETIREMENT (DEMENTIA / COGNITIVE DECLINE)

For Caregivers + Clinicians | DriveAbility Model

STAGE 1: INITIAL CONVERSATION (CALM SETTING, NOT DURING CONFLICT)

🎯 Goal:

Introduce the idea WITHOUT triggering defensiveness.

🗣️ Script:

"Hey, I wanted to talk about something important. The doctor and therapist reviewed everything, and they're concerned about driving safety. They're recommending that you don't drive anymore."

🚫 What NOT to say:

- "You're not safe"
- "You failed the test"
- "You're going to hurt someone"

🧠 Clinical reasoning:

- Avoids threatening identity
- Uses **external authority** → reduces emotional resistance
- Aligns with ADED guidance to **educate and counsel based on safety risk**

STAGE 2: WHEN THEY PUSH BACK ("I'M FINE")

🎯 Goal:

Do NOT argue facts—redirect authority

🗣️ Script Options:

"I hear you. You feel fine. But the medical team has to look at safety, and they've made this decision."

OR

“I understand it doesn’t feel right. But this isn’t about how it feels—it’s about safety.”

🚫 **Avoid:**

- Debating memory (“You got lost last week…”)
- Proving them wrong

🧠 **Why this works:**

- Dementia = impaired insight
- Logical arguments **fail because reasoning is impaired**
- You’re shifting from **logic → authority + safety framing**

STAGE 3: REPEATED QUESTIONING (THE LOOP)

Scenario:

Client asks DAILY: “When can I drive again?”

🎯 **Goal:**

Consistency + no escalation

🗣️ **Script:**

“We’ve already talked about that. The doctor said no driving. But we can still go wherever you want—I’ll take you.”

(Immediately redirect)

“Where do you want to go today?”

🔁 **Repeat EXACT SAME PHRASE each time**

🧠 **Clinical reasoning:**

- Memory impairment → repetition is expected
- ADED: education + reinforcement + structured response improves compliance

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STAGE 4: ANGER / ESCALATION

Scenario:

"You're taking away my independence!"

🎯 **Goal:**

Validate emotion WITHOUT reversing decision

🗣️ **Script:**

"I know this feels really frustrating. Driving is important to you. I'm not taking away your independence—I'm making sure you stay safe."

Pause → then redirect:
"Let's figure out where you want to go today."

🚫 **Avoid:**

- "Calm down"
- "You're overreacting"

🧠 **Clinical reasoning:**

- This is **grief + loss of identity**, not just behavior
- Validation reduces escalation faster than logic

STAGE 5: SAFETY THREAT ("I'M DRIVING ANYWAY")

🎯 **Goal:**

Immediate boundary + safety control

🗣️ **Script:**

"I can't let that happen. It's not safe, and I'm responsible for making sure you're okay."

🔒 **ACTION (NON-NEGOTIABLE):**

- Remove keys
- Disable/move vehicle

- Increase supervision

🧠 **Clinical reasoning:**

- At this point → **capacity is impaired → caregiver must act**
- ADED: when safety risk is present, **cessation + alternative mobility planning is required**

STAGE 6: REDIRECTION (MOST IMPORTANT SKILL)

🎯 **Goal:**

Replace driving—not just remove it

🗣️ **Script Examples:**

"Let's take your car—I'll drive."

"Want to go to Publix or get coffee?"

"I could use your help picking something out at the store."

🧠 **Why this matters:**

Driving =

- Identity
- Control
- Routine

Remove driving WITHOUT replacing → ↑ resistance

STAGE 7: PRESERVING DIGNITY (ADVANCED TECHNIQUE)

🎯 **Goal:**

Allow control without risk

🗣️ **Scripts:**

"You're still in charge of where we go."

"You can navigate—I'll drive."

"Tell me the best way to get there."

🧠 **Clinical reasoning:**

- Maintains **executive role identity**
- Reduces power struggle

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO FLOW (HOW IT ACTUALLY PLAYS OUT)

Mom/Dad: "I'm going to drive to Publix."

Caregiver:
"No, we've already talked about that. The doctor said no driving."

Mom/Dad: "That's ridiculous."

Caregiver:
"I know it feels frustrating. Let's go together—I'll drive."

Mom/Dad: "Fine…"

Caregiver (immediate redirect):
"What do you need from Publix?"

👉 That's a SUCCESSFUL interaction

This guide is provided for educational purposes only and is intended to support caregivers in navigating conversations related to driving safety and driving retirement. It is not a substitute for medical advice, legal guidance, or individualized clinical decision-making.

Recommendations regarding driving status should be made in collaboration with the referring physician and, when applicable, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FLHSMV). Individual circumstances may vary, and caregivers are encouraged to consult with appropriate professionals regarding specific concerns.

DriveAbility | Coastal Occupational Therapy does not assume responsibility for decisions made based on this guide.