

Overview

Do you know that the majority of visually impaired adults drove motor vehicles prior to their vision loss? In fact, you can well imagine how these people struggled with the decision to stop driving because independence and car keys often seem to go hand in hand in North American society. This course provides information about being a nondriver in a society in which the ability to drive is generally assumed. Also, the course will help you transition from driver to nondriver. Even if you have never driven a car, however, this information may provide additional non-driving options. Familiarizing yourself with various transportation issues in North America will enable you to establish and maintain your ability to travel independently.

The course is divided into five lessons. Lesson 1 discusses the social aspects of being a nondriver. Lesson 2 examines the practical implications of using alternate modes of transportation. Lesson 3 focuses on walking and biking. Lesson 4 covers public transit and paratransit. Finally, Lesson 5 examines taxis and hired drivers as transportation options. Like most people, you'll probably end up using a combination of the

modes of transportation described in the course. What matters is that you use the method that can best meet your needs.

Note that this course does not teach orientation and mobility (O&M) skills. Such instruction, which trains you to travel independently and safely in different environments, is beyond the scope of this course. For a referral to an O&M specialist, contact your local rehabilitation agency.

This course has no prerequisite. To complete the course, you will need the materials that The Hadley School for the Blind has provided and writing materials in the medium of your choice. If you are taking the audiocassette version of this course, you will also need your own tape recorder.

Throughout the course, self-directed activities encourage you to reflect on your own experiences, desires, and circumstances as a nondriver. Do not mail your answers to your Hadley instructor, but compare them with the suggested answers. If the answers are relevant to your personal situation, why not keep them handy for future reference? Remember that each person has unique needs and resources. The suggested

answers may or may not suit your situation for a variety of reasons such as family circumstances, personality, or finances. Therefore, do not view this course as a how-to manual. Rather, use it as a tool to explore how you can achieve independence as a nondriver in a car-oriented society.

Complete the assignment that concludes each lesson. If you mail your assignments, send them as Free Matter for the Blind, provided they are in large print (14 point or larger), in braille, on cassette, or on computer disk. Mailing labels are enclosed for your convenience. The contact card that was included with your course materials indicates your instructor's fax number and email address in case you prefer to send your assignments electronically.

Now, if you are ready to start going places as a nondriver, begin Lesson 1: Social Considerations.

Lesson 1: Social Considerations

Various encounters with family, friends, fellow students, coworkers, and community members make up the fabric of your everyday living and social life. How will nondriving affect your daily life and your relationships with others? In the United States particularly, many people consider driving the primary mode of transportation. Therefore, you may experience negative emotions because you are unable to drive. This lesson examines both the negative and positive aspects of nondriving, and presents ways to overcome negative feelings. It explores how your nondriving status may impact your family and friends. Finally, it suggests strategies for interacting with others. Exploring the social aspects of your nondriver status is an important first step in establishing and maintaining your ability to travel independently.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to

- a. examine your feelings as a nondriver

- b. explore the impact of your situation on your family and friends
- c. suggest ways to interact in the community

Your Feelings as a Nondriver

Losing the ability to drive can be difficult, especially if your vision loss is recent. But do you ever stop to think of the positive aspects of nondriving? In time, you may find yourself feeling quite positive about your lifestyle as a nondriver. This section presents “both sides of the coin,” so to speak.

Negative Feelings

Acknowledge your feelings about being unable to drive. By accepting your negative feelings as normal, you’ll be in a better position to handle them when they surface. Many people who face the prospect of nondriving experience anger, depression, isolation, dependence, and lack of spontaneity.

At the beginning especially, you may wonder how you’ll ever cope. Missing the last bus of the day or having a driver cancel at the last moment can definitely trigger feelings of anger. Moreover, you may feel quite depressed about your new lack of mobility.

One negative feeling that may surface is a sense of isolation. You might feel left out of the comings and goings of others when you can't drive yourself where you want to go. You may feel uncomfortable asking for rides, or you may be unfamiliar with alternative transportation options in your community. If you were involved in social activities prior to losing your vision, do you now feel isolated from the friends you no longer meet?

Another negative aspect of nondriving is depending on others to meet your transportation needs. Relinquishing the car keys can be especially difficult if you have to depend on your family members or friends to take you to appointments, restaurants, or sporting activities.

You may also feel that your life lacks spontaneity. Perhaps you resent having to plan, always weighing which transportation option is the most efficient. Repeatedly, you have to consult with others about your transportation needs. Thus, is it surprising if you feel like you've lost your spontaneity when it comes to going places?

Despite these difficulties, remember to keep things in perspective. Certainly, everyone has days when things

aren't going smoothly or when events bring on negative feelings. Remember that you'll be better prepared to face feelings of anger or depression if you can accept that they will surface from time to time. If these feelings permeate each day of your life, however, seek help by speaking to your physician.

Knowing that you could experience feelings of depression from time to time, why not develop a list of things that cheer you up? For example, you might listen to music, call a close relative or friend, or bake a special dessert. Why not explore a hobby, join a book club, or take up a new activity? Writing about incidents that trigger feelings of depression or anger may help you work through these feelings. In fact, writing is often therapeutic, whether you express yourself in a journal, poem, or short story. Perhaps you'd prefer to engage in some sort of physical activity—walking, lifting weights, swimming, or gardening. Experiment and see what helps you put aside those angry or melancholy feelings. What matters is that you can look at the brighter side of life once again.

Why not devise some strategies to reduce isolation? The answer might be as simple as inviting people over.

If getting to the jazz trio practice or the card game presents a challenge, host the event yourself. This way, the group can gather at your place, and you'll enjoy the company of your friends.

Alleviate feelings of dependence by remembering that people can rely on you, too! Perhaps you're the friend who keeps track of everyone's birthday, or the neighbor who can be counted on to get the mail when someone is out of town. In time, you may accept your situation by turning dependence into interdependence, which benefits those around you. Lesson 5 provides additional information on this topic.

If you feel that your life lacks spontaneity, why not do something spur-of-the-moment from time to time? For instance, allocate a certain amount of money per month to do something when the desire hits you. Then treat yourself to the luxury of a taxi. You retain the control to decide when you'll do this and where you'll go. Consider the budgeting tips presented in the next lesson.

Remember that almost all nondrivers experience negative feelings. Rather than letting those feelings consume you, however, develop strategies to minimize

them. In addition, keep in mind the positive aspects of nondriving, which are discussed next.

Positive Feelings

If your nondriving status is recent, you may not have taken the time to reflect on the positive benefits of your situation. Have you considered the benefits of nondriving in terms of your health, social life, autonomy, finances, and environment? Finally, not being able to drive gives you precious time to enjoy what your home has to offer.

What health benefits could nondriving hold for you? Without a doubt, it could make you walk more—to the store, the bus stop, work, or your friend's home. Many people walk for exercise. If you have low vision, biking is another transportation option that offers health benefits. Walking and biking can increase your physical stamina and help you lose weight, which in turn might reduce your risk for many diseases. One last health benefit is reduced stress. If your failing vision made you nervous behind the wheel, you may now find yourself less apprehensive.

Nondrivers enjoy the social benefits of traveling with others. Whereas before you often traveled by yourself,

you are now traveling more with your family and friends. Enjoy this time together! Walking or biking in the community enables you to meet others who are outdoors, an opportunity not afforded to those who drive. If you regularly use paratransit, trains, or buses, you might establish friendships with other commuters on the same schedule.

If you feel that nondriving makes you more dependent, don't forget to also notice your growing self-reliance. You may now arrange and manage your own transportation. This sharpens your problem-solving and reasoning skills. In time, you'll feel more independent as you reclaim control over your life.

A very positive and tangible aspect of nondriving is giving up the upkeep of an automobile. Indeed, did you ever add up the costs of owning a car? Expenses for taxis, drivers, public transit, or paratransit may not even come close to the total expenses of owning your own car. Why not redirect the money you save and enjoy some favorite activities?

Be proud to join the ranks of those who help the environment by not driving. The number of motor vehicles on the roads, streets, and highways climbs

steadily each year. Therefore, one less car—yours—lessens the noise and pollution, which benefits the environment. Look at your nondriver status as a gift to others because you help reduce noise and pollution in the world. Moreover, as a nondriver, you are in an ideal position to advocate for improved transportation in your community. Why not make the needs of the visually impaired community known to your legislators, and offer creative solutions?

Finally, consider the benefits of staying home more often. Indeed, take the time to develop or rediscover some hobbies. Some people enjoy listening to music, sewing, woodworking, or making crafts. Others pursue interests like playing an instrument, cooking gourmet meals, or lifting weights. Time at home enables you to relax. When you were driving to all those places, how much time did you have to enjoy a cup of coffee or tea while sitting on your patio? Listening to the sounds of snarled traffic, aren't you thankful you're not in it? Think how pleasant it is to chat with friends while relaxing on your front porch. You'll have more time to enjoy your family or those with whom you live.

This section discussed the negative feelings many people experience when they can no longer drive. It suggested strategies to deal with these feelings. It also presented the positive aspects of being a nondriver. Can you think of other positive aspects? If so, share them with your instructor. Then move on to the following activity.

Self-Directed Activity

Identify three situations that provoked negative feelings. Describe a positive way to deal with each situation.

Suggested Answer

Answers will vary. For example, you may have felt isolated when your spouse attended a meeting, your children were occupied with their own activities, or two close friends went to a movie without you. What could you have done in these situations? You could have taken a taxi to a nearby mall to do some shopping, walked to a neighborhood park, or prepared a special dinner for your family.

Impact on Family and Friends

If family members or friends depended on you to drive, adjustments are in order. Acknowledge their feelings and reactions to this new situation. Of course, your own response and attitude influence how they feel. This section examines how your nondriving may impact your family and friends. It addresses the need for communication. It also discusses ways to achieve a healthy balance in your relationships.

Communication

Effective communication is essential for a rewarding social life. It becomes even more important when you become a nondriver. Indeed, open the lines of communication between you and the important people in your life. Share your thoughts and feelings with those you love, and discuss what they are thinking and feeling. Together, map out a plan that addresses the needs of everyone, including your transportation issues. How can you take the lead in being an open communicator?

Certain strategies are particularly effective for promoting open lines of communication. For example, set aside regular sessions to openly discuss the issues

related to your visual impairment. Also, a weekly family meeting enables members to compare their schedules, thus avoiding possible conflicts. When communication is especially difficult, some families find counseling helpful.

Become a reflective listener by listening to what another person has to say and repeating it back in a way that acknowledges what has been said. For example, your spouse says, "My hair appointment is next Thursday afternoon." Counter with, "Could I trouble you to drop me off at the barber shop when you go to the hairdresser next Thursday? I'll take a taxi home, unless you can pick me up when you're done. What time were you planning to leave?"

Be sensitive to signals others give. The people in your life will welcome the opportunity to sit back and be driven. Keep this in mind and arrange for a taxi from time to time. For example, take a taxi to treat your spouse to dinner and a movie, or arrange an outing with another couple who can do the driving. Why not plan a trip where the two of you use public transportation to reach your destination? Never assume that your friend will be willing to drive you to the

department store next week just because he or she volunteered to drive you to the hardware store last week.

Let others know when you are simply venting your frustrations, so they do not feel obliged to do something. You know that you are simply venting, but others may not. For example, you may have a stressful day using paratransit and just want someone with whom to share your frustrations. If you are not forthcoming, the other person may feel guilty and resentfully offer to drive you the next time.

Do your loved ones have a full understanding of your visual impairment? Keep your family and friends informed about what you can and cannot see. Describe the adaptations you need (e.g., light-colored dishes placed on a dark place mat, extra light for reading, doors and drawers not left ajar). In many parts of the United States, agencies provide classes for family members whose loved one experiences vision loss. Explore the services available in your community.

If you have children, talk to them about your nondriving. They may be feeling resentful, especially if you were the designated driver for getting them to

school, soccer practice, or a friend's house. As is typical of children, they may blurt out things that hurt, such as, "I hate having to wait for Mom to drive me to Megan's house now that you can't." Sit down with your children and openly discuss your nondriving status—but not in the heat of the moment when transportation is an immediate concern.

Children may have other concerns. A young child might fear that you're not going to be the same parent as before. An older teen may be concerned about experiencing vision loss later in life, just as you are. Always be honest and discuss your visual impairment as well as its impact on you and your family. Tailor your language to the children's ages, and help them understand the cause of your visual impairment. If pertinent, be honest about the possibility of inheriting your condition.

Communication enables you, your family members, and your friends to work through good and bad feelings. Enlist the understanding and assistance of the important people in your life as they, too, adjust to your vision loss and nondriving status. Other people may feel guilty because, unlike you, they can still drive.

Without honest discussions, they may be reluctant to talk about their feelings for fear of upsetting you.

Let people know that you are not seeking pity or trying to make them feel guilty. Acknowledge the helpful things that they do! Work together with your family to adjust household responsibilities. Reassure them that you don't want to depend on anyone.

Let others know that you plan to develop a transportation "toolbox" from which you can choose. If you have a dripping faucet, don't you pull out your toolbox to get a hammer, wrench, or screwdriver? Similarly, you'll open your transportation toolbox to determine which option enables you to meet a specific transportation need.

A Balancing Act

How easy would it be to fall into the habit of letting someone drive you? It may, at times, be appropriate to have someone drive you. But it's important to maintain a healthy give-and-take in your relationships. Keeping a balance as you and others adjust to your nondriving status is vital to maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships.

What can you do if you sense that family or friends sometimes resent having to drive you to various places? If you live in a community where few transportation options exist, reciprocate for the rides. Perhaps your son would appreciate your sending him off with a home-cooked meal that he can share with his family after helping you with your weekly errands. Lesson 5 addresses exchanging for services in greater detail.

Your relationships are based neither on your visual impairment nor on your status as a nondriver. Some are based on family bonds forged by time spent together. Others, like your friendships, result from shared interests like playing games, pursuing hobbies, or having children the same age. Add nondriving to the mix, however, and reciprocity becomes key to maintaining relationships. Be a fair family member and friend. In turn, your relatives and friends will adjust to the situation and willingly provide the assistance you need.

As you explore the transportation options discussed in subsequent lessons, remember the importance of open

communication. Finally, keep things well balanced to maintain good relationships with family and friends.

Self-Directed Activity

Describe one conflict that has arisen with a family member or friend as a result of your nondriving status. As you review the situation, explain what you could have done differently to achieve a more positive outcome.

Suggested Answer

Answers will vary. For example, your spouse became upset when you scheduled a doctor's appointment at 2:00 on a Wednesday afternoon, a time when she typically plays tennis. Could she have been frustrated because your nondriving prevents her from pursuing a favorite activity? She may have felt that you're taking advantage of the situation, not even bothering to consult with her before you confirmed your doctor's appointment.

If you identified a similar situation, you may decide to schedule a weekly meeting where family members discuss upcoming commitments and transportation needs. For some of your activities, ask if someone can

provide transportation. For other trips, use alternate transportation like a bus or taxi.

Community Interactions

As you travel within your community, you'll encounter a variety of individuals. Thus consider ways to handle both positive and negative interactions. This section focuses on interactions with members of your community.

Traveling requires that you interact with dispatchers, drivers, public transit patrons, business owners, and many others. What type of information specific to your vision loss should you share with others? As a general rule, people will be happy to assist you. Certainly, they will be more understanding and accommodating if you explain how your vision is affected. For example, let the taxi driver know that even if you can see a large building from the curb, you cannot identify the entrance. This way, the driver may gladly walk you to the door or offer the assistance you need. Just give a simple, concise explanation to help others understand why you need assistance.

Some instances where you may disclose this type of information include

- explaining to a bus driver why you need street names or a specific stop announced
- gaining a seat near the driver so you can communicate more easily with him or her
- requesting that a taxi driver or hired driver accompany you to the entrance of a building or to a specific room or business (Note: It is a good idea to tip well when the taxi driver provides additional services.)
- getting specific information about the location of stops or entrances so you can more easily navigate the public transit system
- getting specific directions on how to reach a destination
- obtaining a description of the neighborhood surrounding your destination

Imagine the following situation: Mr. Goeke's macular degeneration has resulted in no functional central vision. He often explains his vision loss by saying, "What happens when someone takes your picture and the flash goes off? For a brief moment, you only see a spot of purple light in the center, even if some of your side vision remains. Well, that spot never goes away

for me.” Mr. Goeke’s explanation is in simple terms that most individuals can relate to.

Despite the best explanation, however, some people may respond rudely or choose to ignore you. For example, a bus driver does not announce street names even after you request it. Or a receptionist curtly gives you an address and insufficient directions. Each situation is unique and requires a different approach. Could you restate your request because you need assistance? Can someone close by help you? Should you complain to the person’s superior? What you do will depend on the circumstances. In any case, losing your temper seldom helps.

Remember that some people may try to help when you haven’t asked for or don’t need assistance. For instance, if you stand near an intersection, someone may simply pull you by the arm, thinking you need to cross. If this happens, politely but firmly state that you do not want help. Why not turn such encounters into opportunities to educate the public about your abilities? The next time someone grabs your arm and starts crossing the street, explain that you can do so on your own using your hearing and your white cane.

Try to keep in mind that you are a source of information for the public who may know very little about visual impairment. Think of yourself as an ambassador helping to pave the way for other visually impaired people who use transportation sources.

This section suggested ways to improve your communication skills as you travel within your community. As the next lessons focus on specific modes of transportation, consider how you can apply this information as you interact with neighbors, drivers, dispatchers, and everyday people.

Self-Directed Activity

Prepare a short statement that you could use to explain your visual impairment to the various people you encounter while you travel.

Suggested Answer

Answers will vary based on the nature of the visual impairment. If you have macular degeneration, you could use something similar to Mr. Goeke's explanation. Limit your statement to a few short sentences and use simple, easy-to-understand words.

Summary

More than ever, you now have to keep the lines of communication open with the people you interact with. First, recognize your own feelings—negative and positive—and identify how to deal with them. Similarly, be sensitive to and address the concerns of family and friends. Indeed, your nondriving has a substantial impact not only on your life but on theirs. Finally, find ways to improve how you interact with others.

Assignment 1

Complete this assignment in the medium of your choice. Begin by giving your full name, address, and phone number. Also indicate the course title, Assignment 1, your instructor's name, and the date. Then provide your answers. Be sure to indicate the question number along with each answer. Instructions for sending assignments can be found in the Overview to the course.

Part A

The goal of this course is to help you establish and maintain your independence and your ability to travel within your community. Your instructor would like to help you achieve this goal. As a way to introduce

yourself and give your instructor the opportunity to personalize this course so that it better meets your needs, answer the following questions:

1. Describe your home environment by supplying the following information:
 - Do you live in an urban setting, a suburban community, or a rural location?
 - Do you live in an apartment or a single-family home?
 - Who are the members of your household?
 - Who in your household, if anyone, has a driver's license?
 - Do you have relatives or friends who drive?
 - What places do you typically travel to on a regular basis (e.g., school, work, or volunteer site)?
2. Were you ever a driver? If so, when did you stop driving?
3. Describe your visual condition and any additional disabilities.
4. Explain whether you have any functional vision. How is this vision helpful in everyday life?

5. Tell how your visual condition and any other disabilities impact your ability to go places.

Part B

6. Identify two negative feelings related to your nondriving status, and explain how you can deal with them when they surface.
7. How does your nondriving impact your family and friends? Give five examples of ways you can improve your communication with loved ones in regard to nondriving.
8. What information could you give a taxi dispatcher, and then the driver, to ensure that you get appropriate assistance once you arrive at your destination?

Once you have completed this assignment, mail, fax, or email it to your instructor. You can then proceed to Lesson 2: Practical Implications.