

Parental involvement helps keep teen drivers safe



Car crashes continue to be the number one cause of death for U.S. teens. As a parent or caregiver, this fact can be hard to hear, but understanding it is crucial to keeping your new driver safe. Whether you are excited or anxious about this milestone, your involvement as your teen learns to drive will directly affect the type of driver they'll be throughout their life.

In 2020, the number of people killed in crashes involving at least one young driver increased to 5,037. Young drivers themselves accounted for 1,885 of these deaths, while the other 3,152 lives lost belonged to passengers, pedestrians and occupants of other vehicles. Thousands of people and their loved ones are affected by these crashes each year, but you can help your teen prepare for roadway risks and prevent these tragedies.

This is not just an issue of teens driving irresponsibly. American roads are the deadliest they have been in years, posing increased risks for drivers young and old. As a parent or caregiver, you are the number one influence on your teen's driving habits. Take this role seriously and always drive the way you'd want your teen to drive. Working together, you can help your teen avoid roadway risks and stay safe, from their first drive with a permit all the way through their first year of solo driving.

Teen driver risks

There's no shortage of roadway risks for your teen, but openly discussing them and focusing on them during practice sessions can go a long way toward keeping your teen safe:

Inexperience

- Teens crash most often because they are inexperienced – not because they take more risks behind the wheel. This inexperience often leads to mistakes like being distracted by something inside or outside the vehicle, forgetting to scan the roadway, and driving too fast for conditions. Talk through these risks with your new driver and share your own experiences with them so your teen can learn how to stay safe.

Cell phones

- Any distraction behind the wheel can be deadly, but cell phones are particularly risky. And while most of us understand that using the phone while driving is dangerous, we all tend to believe we are the exception who can do it safely. We call this multitasking and we picture our brain managing a variety of tasks equally, all at the same time. In reality, our brain actually switches back and forth between each task. Every time your brain switches tasks, it slows your reaction time. That's not a big deal when you're texting a friend while watching TV, but it can be deadly behind the wheel. The results are similar whether you're holding the phone in your hand or using it hands-free; a driver on the phone can miss up to 50 percent of their driving environment and that distraction can linger up to 27 seconds after the call ends.

- o Never drive distracted and teach your teen to do the same; silence your phone and put it away or enable your phone's "Do Not Disturb" feature before starting the vehicle
- o Teach your teen that if something comes up, pull over to a safe location and put the vehicle in park before handling their phone

Passengers

- Having passengers might not seem like a big deal compared to other driving risks, but their presence can be too much for new drivers. This is especially true of other teen passengers – including siblings – who know just which buttons to push to frustrate or take the attention of your teen. Studies have shown just one teen passenger increases a teen driver's fatal crash risk significantly, which increases the risks for everyone on the road.
- o Don't ask your teen to drive younger siblings around during their first year of driving, even if it's convenient for you
- o Don't let your teen be a passenger in another teen's car

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Scanning the road

- Most of the time, experienced adult drivers are able to spot and avoid hazards on the road. New teen drivers, however, still have a lot to learn. The science says they only have about three seconds to react and prevent a crash: one to recognize the hazard and two more to react. Unfortunately, in many instances, new teen drivers can't identify a potential hazard in the first place, much less react to it.
 - o Teach your teen to always scan the road for potential hazards, including at lights and stop signs
 - o Talk with your teen about hazards in a variety of situations, including construction zones, parking lots and near pedestrian walkways

Speeding

- Speeding is one of the most dangerous habits behind the wheel yet it's incredibly common. Teach your teen to check regularly for changes in the speed limit and to slow down in poor weather conditions, such as fog, rain or snow, since they can make steering and stopping much more difficult. New drivers don't often know how their car will react in different traffic and weather situations, but slower speeds can help them stay in control.
 - o Take your teen out on a rainy or snowy day to a quiet street or parking lot free of hazards. Hands-on experience is the best way to show them how reducing their speed can help them better control the car in these conditions.
 - o When driving, regularly ask your teen to name the posted speed limit. This will help your teen stay aware of their speed and adjust it as the limit or conditions change.

Night driving

- Research shows that teens are disproportionately killed in crashes at night, when it's more difficult to spot and react to hazards on the road. Yet driving at night is a crucial skill for teens to learn so they can stay safe. Limit your teen's practice lessons to the daytime until they build some experience and when you do practice with them at night, go slow. Review the vehicle's manual with your teen to learn about the different light options and show them how, as the daylight fades, it becomes much more difficult to see other vehicles, road signs and pedestrians.
 - o Once on the road, point out how other drivers' lights can impair your teen's ability to see and make sure they practice flipping from high to low beams for oncoming drivers
 - o Let your teen know you can always pick them up if they'd prefer not to drive home at night

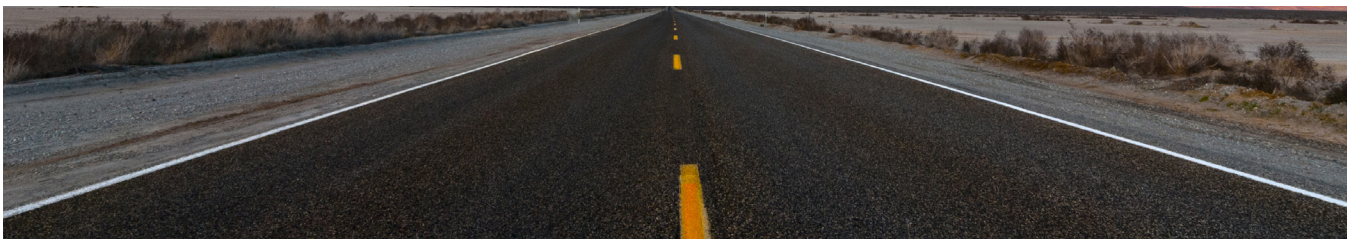
Graduated driver licensing

Each state has GDL laws that limit passengers, nighttime driving and other risky situations for new teen drivers. These laws, however, are not enough. Visit iihs.org and search GDL to learn more about the laws in your state and how you can go above and beyond them to keep your teen safe.*

Get and stay involved

If you have a teen, make an effort to get and stay involved in their driving education, from their classroom lessons all the way through their first full year of driving. Our Pointers for Parents can provide ideas for weekly lessons and our New Driver Deal can help you both get on the same page about driving rules and responsibilities. For additional resources and tips on coaching your teen, visit DriveitHOME.org.

*Graduated Driver Licensing



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