Maintaining a Safe Following Distance While Driving (Part 1)

You probably covered following at a safe distance when your teen was first learning to drive. But now that you have a licensed driver, you won't always be in the car to give the “following too close” warning.

1. Have a safe cushion
Remind your teen to maintain a safe “cushion” around the car—both in front and behind.

2. The three-second rule
Pick a marker along the road like a sign or a landmark. When the car in front passes that marker, start counting. It should take your car three seconds or more to pass the same spot. If this is the case, your teen is following at the correct minimum distance. Five seconds is even safer. Always increase the following distance if there are bad weather conditions present.

3. What to watch out for
   • Be sure your teen is watching out for the car behind yours as well as the car in front.
   • If someone seems a bit close (tailgating) or is on the phone, your teen should slow down (not slam on the brakes) and let them pass. People talking on phones are less likely to stop in time for unexpected events.
   • If someone cuts in front of your car, your teen should not slam on the brakes or swerve out of the way (unless it is the only way to avoid a collision). The safer response is to slow down by removing the driver's foot from the gas pedal.
   • Finally, remind your teen that trucks and motorcycles can't stop as quickly as cars, so it's safer to increase the distance between your car and these vehicles.
   • Remind your teen to avoid driving in another driver's blind spot.

Your teen will encounter aggressive or unsafe drivers on the road at times, but these defensive techniques will help keep them safe.