Maintaining a Safe Following Distance While Driving (Part 2)

We recommend the three-second rule as the best way to determine how closely to follow the vehicle in front of you. And remember: three seconds is the minimum; five seconds is even better.

1. Help teens practice the three-second rule

- They should start counting when the car ahead passes a telephone pole, a billboard or any other fixed object.
- They should count “one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three.” This should be approximately three seconds.
- If your car reaches the fixed object before they stop counting, they are too close to the other car. They should ease off the accelerator a bit to widen the gap, then check the following distance again.
- In bad weather, teens should increase their following distance significantly. This provides more reaction time.
- If teens are being tailgated, advise them to use a five–six second following distance and slow down. This will encourage the bad driver who’s tailgating to pass your vehicle.
- If you are hauling a boat, trailer or camper, teach your teen to add one second to your following distance for every ten feet of additional length. The added weight of the trailer requires a longer stopping distance for your vehicle.