

Tips for Keeping Your Teen Driver Safe

By Jim Liebelt

While obtaining a driver's license is still one of the more anticipated rites of passage for teens today, it's increasingly apparent that teen driving is one of the most overlooked dangers our kids face. Many parents view the teen driving years with mixed emotions. On the one hand, a driver's license signifies an end to the endless chauffeuring that is a hallmark of kids' younger years, and this brings some welcome relief to parents. On the other hand, teen driving leads to no shortage of anxiety when considering the dangers that come part and parcel with seeing their kids behind the wheel of a car.

With an understanding of the dangers involved with teen driving and an intentional plan that includes placing strict boundaries on driving behaviors, parents can minimize the risks involved and help their kids stay safe during the teen driving years.

The Facts About Teen Driving

- Between March of 2003 and August of 2006, about 2,600 American troops died in the war in Iraq. In contrast, during the same time period, more than 22,000 teenagers, aged 15-19, died in traffic accidents on U.S. roads.
- More than 6,200 teens are killed in motor vehicle crashes in the U.S. each year (that's about 120 teens every week.)
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for persons aged 15 to 19 years old.
- Fatal accidents for 16- and 17-year-old drivers jump 20% in July and August, making them the deadliest months for teen drivers.
- 62% of teenage passenger deaths occurred in motor vehicle crashes in which another teenager was driving.
- Four out of every 10 teenagers that die in this country are killed in a motor vehicle crash.
- Drivers ages 16-20 account for a disproportionately high number of accidents. In 2004, those drivers were involved in 1.8 million crashes, and 8,535 people were killed in crashes involving young drivers, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says.
- For every teen that is killed in a motor vehicle crash, 19 are seriously injured.

- On average, a teenager is injured every 15 minutes in a motor vehicle crash in the United States.
- After-school hours rival weekend nights as the peak hours for fatal crashes involving teenage drivers, according to a study released by AAA. The travel club analyzed federal crash data involving 16- and 17-year-old drivers from 2002-05. It found that almost as many people died in such crashes between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. on weekdays as on Friday and Saturday nights. For overall traffic deaths, the 3 p.m.-6 p.m. period has been the deadliest period every year since 1993, federal data show.
- 64% percent of teens killed between 1995 and 2000 in motor vehicle crashes were not wearing seat belts.
- A study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHoP), sponsored by State Farm Insurance, concluded that the first six-month period of licensure is the most dangerous time for any driver, and the crash risk remains twice as high as that for adult drivers until age 25.
- One in three teen drivers has an accident within the first year of getting their license.
- One in five of all Americans, ages 16-20, drove under the influence of drugs or alcohol last year.
- Nearly 50% of teens surveyed said they text message while driving, and 51% talk on cell phones.
- From 1998-2002, there was an estimated 300,000 crashes due to cell phone use while driving.
- Teens report their biggest driving distraction is text messaging via cell phone.
- Several studies indicate that 40% - 50% of teens say they speed more than 5 miles per hour over the speed limit when driving alone.

Statistical Sources¹

How Parents Can Keep Teens Safe

While there is no guarantee your teen can avoid being involved in a motor vehicle accident while driving or while riding in a car being driven by another teen, you can help minimize the risks involved. Here's how:

¹ *Autoweek*, September 4, 2006.

Guideline Inc., *2006 Teens Today Survey: Driving Results*, August 2006.

Web MD

USA Today

t-driver.com

1. Be Intentional. Develop a plan for keeping your teen driver safe and implement it. Don't just assume that everything will work out okay without a plan in place. Don't put it off. Because the risks involved in teen driving are so daunting, being intentional about a plan is the only reasonable way to minimize the risks.

2. Set clear expectations and consequences. This is one area of parenting that your teen's safety, perhaps even their life, depends upon. Sit down with your teen and hash out the details together. Some areas for setting limits include:

A. Driving Permission.

When will it be okay for your teen to drive? When will it not be okay? Late afternoon, evening, and night driving carry higher risks for teen drivers. Seek to minimize driving during these times as much as possible. Set standards for your teen riding along in other teen-driven vehicles, as well.

B. Who Can Go Along?

Many states use a graduated licensing system that prohibits and/or limits when teens can drive with other teenagers in the vehicle. Make sure you know your state's laws and insure that they are followed. You might even choose to place your own tougher limits than the state requires.

C. Notification.

Do you want to be notified before your teen gets behind the wheel? How about when he or she is going to ride in a vehicle driven by another teen? Do you want to be notified when your teen arrives at the destination? All of these issues should be considered and determined ahead of time.

D. Speeding.

Okay, obviously, you don't want your teen driver to speed. That's a given. But, what will happen if they are caught violating the speed limit?

E. Cell Phones.

I suggest a policy of not allowing the use of a cell phone while driving. This means no receiving calls (even from you), no placing calls (even to you), no checking or sending text messages. If your teen needs to use their cell phone in the case of an emergency, have them pull off the road to a safe location, park the car, and then use the cell phone.

F. Alcohol/Drug Usage.

This is another obvious "not allowed." Any violation should give rise to an appropriately severe consequence.

G. Seatbelt Usage.

3. Provide Plenty of Supervised Driving Practice. Driving skills are improved through driving experience. Don't rush the process. The driver's license can wait awhile. Make sure you give your teen hours and hours (some experts suggest between 50-100 hours over a 6-month period) of practice driving that is supervised by you or another responsible adult.

4. Consider Advanced Driver Training. Many (most?) driver-training programs are

designed to prepare a student to pass their state's driver examinations and receive a driver's license. A good question for you to consider: Is that amount of training adequate for your teen? Throughout the U.S., there are companies that provide advanced driver training programs that more thoroughly prepare teens to become good drivers. The September, 4, 2006 issue of *AutoWeek* provided the following links to advanced driver training program websites:

www.driversedge.com

www.streetsurvival.org

www.masterdrive.com

www.drivers.com/topic/8/

www.drivesafer.com

www.drivingconcepts.com

www.teendrivers.com

www.carcontrolschool.com

www.survivethedrive.org

www.drivingmba.com

www.roadreadyteens.org

www.tirerack.com (click the "motorsports and driver's schools" button on the home page)

http://raceschool.com/newsite/teen_academy.html

<http://nsc.org/train/ddc/student/alive25.cfm>

www.xtrememeasures.org

<http://redlinerresistance.com/>

5. Consider Tracking Systems when Accountability is Needed. Today's technology has opened the door for automobile tracking systems which provide you with specific details on your teen's driving habits. This might seem like overkill for many parents, but you might consider this, particularly if your teen has a not-so-good track record as a driver, or consistently violates the limits you've put in place. These systems provide an extra measure of accountability if you determine it's needed. For further research, investigate the following websites:

<http://www.vehicle-tracking.com/>

<http://www.brickhousesecurity.com/teen-driving-tracking.html>

<http://autos.msn.com/advice/CRArt.aspx?contentid=4023927>

<http://www.teentracking.com/>

<http://www.youthdrivingsafe.org/>

6. Keep the Conversation Going. Your teen's safety is the issue so don't limit the subject of teen driving to a one-time-only conversation. Keep the discussion going. Check in regularly about teen driving issues. Use news items regarding teen driving as a springboard into conversation about the topic.

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