

# Risky Business

## Teens as Beginning Drivers



Child  
Safety  
Facts  
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### Why are teen drivers at high risk of being involved in crashes?

- They have little practice dealing with dangerous traffic and road conditions.
- They are impulsive and often do risky things behind the wheel.

### Helping Your Teenager be a Safer Driver

Most parents have mixed feelings when their teenagers start to drive. Young people gain freedom, but face real dangers on the road.

The youngest and newest teen drivers are most likely to have fatal crashes. Recent laws, such as graduated licensing and “zero tolerance” for teen drinking and driving, help prevent crashes. Parents play a big part in preventing these tragedies, too.

#### Did you know?

- Inexperience, poor judgment, and distraction by passengers are the main problems for teen drivers.
- Night driving, speeding, and driver errors are most likely to be related to new driver crashes.
- Young, 16-year-old drivers are more likely than older drivers to cause the crashes they are in.
- Teen drivers are more likely to crash if other youths are in the car with them. This is especially true if several others are with them.
- Many teens are killed riding in cars driven by other teens. Younger brothers and sisters are also in danger riding with new teen drivers.
- Teen drivers are more likely to crash when they are just driving around for fun.
- Seat belt use is much lower among teens than adults.
- Driving after drinking or using drugs is risky at any age. Older teens are more likely to have crashes involving alcohol than younger teens.



### Actions Parents Can Take

**You are a role model.** Your children learn by watching you. No matter what you say, they will speed, rush through yellow lights, use a cell phone, or drive without buckling their seat belt if they have seen you do so.

**Support a “graduated driver licensing” (GDL) law in your state.** This limits teen driving while they gain experience. New drivers get a full license after a year or more, if they avoid tickets and crashes.

**Remember: driving is a privilege.** Your teen may think it is a right, but you can set limits with love and concern. If there is no GDL law in your state, be sure you:

- Give your teen plenty of practice driving with you for a year or more.
- Do not allow your teen to drive with any teenage passengers at first and later with more than one friend..
- Set a driving curfew with your teen of 10 or 11 pm.
- Take a strong stand against alcohol use.
- Insist on seat belt use by everyone in the vehicle.
- Take a strong stand against using a cell phone while driving, including text messaging. Insist that he stop in a safe area before using his phone.

**Talk frankly with your teen about the risks** of driving and the worries you have. Teens want to know you care about them, even if they do not tell you so.



## Practical Tips for Parents

■ **Choose a safe car for your teen.** Keep in mind that a “cool” vehicle is not likely to be the safest:

- Passenger cars (such as sedans, station wagons) are safer than SUVs and pickup trucks. SUVs and pickups are much more likely to roll over.
- Big, heavy cars are safer than smaller, lighter ones. Avoid small, sporty models.
- Air bags and anti-lock brakes are valuable features.
- A car with an automatic transmission will have less power. This helps reduce risky driving.

■ **Expect your teen to pay** all (or his share) of the insurance for the car he drives. Some auto insurance companies give discounts to teens who participate in a defensive driving course. Check with your insurer.

■ **Insist on seat belt use.** Make sure your teen knows how to PROPERLY buckle up.

Make buckling up part of the driving privilege. Seat belt use is necessary even if the car has air bags. Passengers in the back seat also need to use seat belts, even if it’s not a law. An unbuckled person can be thrown around in the car during a crash and could hurt others.

If driving younger children, make sure your teen knows how to PROPERLY use car seats and boosters.

■ **Give your teen plenty of practice driving** with you or another adult, even after he gets his license. Driver education courses alone do not make safe drivers. The more hours of supervised practice they have, the better. Make sure your teen has practice driving day and night, on different kinds of roads and under different weather conditions.

■ **Set up your own “graduated license” system** if your state does not have one. At first, limit driving to trips during daylight. Wait until your teen has driven at least 1,000 miles or 6 months before allowing friends in the car. Let your teen earn more freedom as she gains experience and drives safely.

■ **Limit your teen’s rides with young friends** if no adult is in the car. Research shows that the risk of having a fatal car crash increases by up to five times when a teen driver has teen passengers in the car. Your chauffeuring days are not quite over!

■ **Explain and enforce no-drinking-and-driving rules.** Make sure your teen knows to avoid riding with a driver who has been drinking. If your teen drinks despite your rule, make sure she has options other than driving. In

either case, tell her she could call you or another adult, take a taxi, or stay with a friend.

■ **Give your teen a curfew.** Teens have far fewer crashes in places with nighttime curfews. Talk with other parents to set similar rules, if possible.

■ **Don’t allow motorcycle riding.** The death rate for teen motorcycle riders is much higher than that for teenage car drivers. A helmet and protective clothing reduce the risk of serious injury or death, but do not eliminate it.

■ **Make an agreement for safe driving.** You and your teen should create and sign it together. Agree on safe behavior and what will happen (consequences) if rules are broken (see Resources below).

■ **Follow through with consequences if rules are broken.** Be willing to take away the keys for a while, even if it means you have to drive more. Your teen needs to know you are serious about the rules and that safety is a priority.

■ **Praise your teen when he follows the rules.** Teens still need to hear “I’m proud of you.” Research shows teens form good habits based on praise they receive.

## Resources

Driving Skills For Life: parents’ guide, educator lesson plans, driving tips and challenge games for teens; [www.drivingskillsforlife.com](http://www.drivingskillsforlife.com)

Highway Safety Reserch Center, University of North Carolina: graduated licensing, sample parent-teen driving agreement; [www.hsrc.unc.edu/safety\\_info/young\\_drivers/index.cfm](http://www.hsrc.unc.edu/safety_info/young_drivers/index.cfm)

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS): “Beginning Teenage Drivers” ([www.iihs.org/brochures/pdf/beginning\\_drivers.pdf](http://www.iihs.org/brochures/pdf/beginning_drivers.pdf)), “Young Drivers: The High Risk Years” video, and “Status Report,” a free newsletter about traffic safety; 703-247-1536, [www.iihs.org](http://www.iihs.org)

I Promise Program: sample parent-teen contract, [www.ipromiseprogram.com](http://www.ipromiseprogram.com)

Keeping Young Drivers Safe: web sites for parents and educators, [www.chop.edu/youngdrivers](http://www.chop.edu/youngdrivers)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: 888-327-4236, [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov)

National Teen Driver Safety Campaign: [www.ridelikeyafriend.com](http://www.ridelikeyafriend.com)

Road Ready Teens: parents’ guide, sample parent-teen contract, “Streetwise” video game for teens; [www.roadreadyteens.org](http://www.roadreadyteens.org)

Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD): 877-723-3462, [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org)

Your state’s Office of Highway Safety, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, AAA clubs, and other groups