

The 12 Biggest Dangers to Teen Drivers

Updated July 25, 2015.

Teens are at the highest risk for injury and death from car accidents. Teens tend to underestimate hazardous driving situations and they are less able than older drivers to recognize dangerous situations.

Becoming aware of the biggest dangers to teen drivers provides you with an opportunity to teach your teen how to avoid these hazards. Understanding the reasons teens commonly get into crashes can also assist you in establishing driving rules for your teen

1. Inclement Weather

Weather conditions like rain, snow, and even fog can amplify risks for inexperienced drivers. Sometimes teens aren't aware of the need to increase following distance or reduce their speed in inclement weather.

2. Nighttime Driving

Driving at night poses challenges for inexperienced drivers. Poor visibility, fatigue, and greater increase of driver impairment likely contribute to the high crash rate at night. Approximately 40% of all fatal crashes involving teens occur between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.

3. Driving with Teen Passengers

Driving around other teen passengers can be a big distraction. Sometimes teens experience peer pressure to "drive faster" and other times, a teen may want to show off for friends. Many states have implemented laws that restrict newly licensed drivers from transporting other teens for this reason

4. Distracted Driving

Cell phones, radios, and food often serve as distractions for young drivers. Despite commercials and campaigns warning teens of the dangers of distracted driving, 41% of American teens admit to texting or emailing while driving, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Texting isn't the only way cell phones pose risks. Dialing a cell phone or reaching for a dropped cell phone may also pose major safety risks.

5. Not Using Seatbelts

Young people remain the biggest offenders when it comes to not wearing seatbelts. In 2008, only 80% of 16 to 24 year olds reported wearing a seatbelt, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In 2009, 56% of 16 to 20 year olds involved in fatal car crashes were not wearing seatbelts.

6. Speeding

Driving too fast is a major problem, especially among adolescent males. Among the males between the ages of 15 and 20 who were involved in fatal car crashes, 39% were speeding, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Sometimes teens simply enjoy taking risks and they view themselves as immune from fatal consequences

7. Tailgating

Not leaving enough following distance leads to a large number of car accidents for teens. Sometimes teens don't recognize the need to slow down and leave plenty of room between them and the car in front of them.

8. Insufficient Scanning Ahead

Inexperienced drivers are sometimes guilty of only looking directly in front of the vehicle. When they don't scan far enough ahead down the road, they miss hazards in the roadway, such as pedestrians, animals crossing the road, or even traffic lights

9. Substance Use

Despite many public safety initiatives to educate teens on the dangers of using drugs and alcohol while driving, many teens don't heed the warnings. Approximately 1 in 5 teen drivers involved in deadly car accidents tested positive for alcohol, according to a 2010 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A 2012 report showed that 1 in 10 teens drinks and drives. Many teens underestimate the risks of using other substances, such as prescription drugs and marijuana while driving as well.

10. Driving While Tired

Many teens are sleep-deprived and they're at risk of falling asleep behind the wheel. Teens who get less than eight hours of sleep are more likely to fall asleep behind the wheel.

11. General Driver Inexperience

The first year after getting a driver's license is the riskiest time of all. The only way to improve driving ability is to gain more time behind the wheel. It's important for parents to provide plenty of supervision and learning opportunities to help teen drivers gain more knowledge and experience.

12. Summer Driving

The summer months are the most common time of year for teen fatalities. The Fourth of July has been named the deadliest day for 16 and 17-year-old drivers, according to reports from AAA, based on data compiled from 2006 to 2010. June 10, May 20, August 14, and September 26 were also reported as being the days with the highest teen driver fatalities. When the weather is nice, teens may be more likely to be cele-

Teen Driver Safety Pledge: A Contract Any Teen Driver Should Sign

Establish Your Expectations and Rules Before Your Teen Gets Behind the Wheel

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If your teen has obtained a learner's permit or a driver's license, it's important to talk about safety issues. Teens need to understand that driving is a privilege, not a right. Parents have the responsibility to ensure that teens are able to operate a vehicle in a safe manner so it's essential that you have ongoing discussions with your teen about safety.

Discuss consequences of breaking your rules and driving in an irresponsible manner ahead of time. It's also important to have clear rules about who will be responsible for the financial issues associated with driving the car, such as paying for gas, car maintenance and vehicle insurance.

Before you hand over the keys to your teen, create a contract that makes it clear what you expect. Print out this pledge, or develop your own pledge that outlines your rules before your teen gets behind the wheel.

General Rules

- I agree to observe all laws while I am driving the car.
- I will ask to drive the car before going anywhere, unless it involves a trip to an already agreed upon place, like school.
- I will respect the weather and the road conditions at all times.
- I will wear my seatbelt at all times while I am driving and I will insist that all passengers wear theirs.
- I will allow myself plenty of time to arrive at my destination. If I'm running late, I will not speed but will instead accept any consequences I may receive for being late.
- I will not engage in reckless behavior, and will never attempt to do any "stunts." Instead, I will use the car for transportation purposes only.
- I will inform you immediately about any tickets, accidents, or encounters with the police (even if I only receive a warning).
- I will call you if I'm ever unsafe to drive, or if it is unsafe for me to ride with someone else, for any reason.

Distracted Driving

- I will not use any electronic devices while I am driving the car, including cell phones. I will pull over to make a phone call or use any other electronic equipment.
- I will never read or respond to text messages, emails, or social media while I am driving.
- I will not eat while I am driving.
- I will never drive if I have used any alcohol or any substances that could impair my ability to drive.
- I will not drive the car when I am too upset to operate the vehicle, whether I'm angry, sad, or frustrated.
- I will get plenty of rest so that I am not sleep deprived. I will not operate the vehicle when I feel drowsy.

Passengers

- I will not allow anyone else to drive the car without permission.
- If I receive permission to drive any passengers, I will ensure that my friend's parents have given permission for my friend to ride with me.
- I will not have any passengers in the car unless I have specific permission.

- I will not ride as a passenger with anyone who has consumed alcohol or who has used any substances that impair their ability to drive.
- I will not allow anything illegal to be in the car. I understand that I am responsible for any drugs, alcohol or weapons in the car, even if they don't belong to me.

How to Teach Your Teen About Being a Responsible Driver

Safe Driving Habits Begin the First Time Teens Hit the Road

Driving a car is a lot of [responsibility](#). Teens do not always comprehend how important these responsibilities are to their own safety as well as that of the other drivers around them.

Parents need to not only [talk to their teen](#) about these responsibilities. You can show your teen what each responsibility means while [teaching them to drive](#).

Tips for Teaching Your Teen the Responsibilities of Driving

Car Maintenance

Encourage your teen to be involved with the maintenance of the vehicle they drive.

- They should know when the car does not sound normal and when to pull into the garage to seek help.
- If they feel it is a minor problem, they should tell you as soon as possible.
- Have them [read](#) the car manual and understand the basic functions of the car's parts.
- Have your teen keep the car clean and gassed up.
- [New drivers should know](#) how to put air in the tires, gas in the tank and check the oil.

Follow the Law

Require your teen to follow the [laws of your state](#) for permit, graduated driving and other licensing requirements. Each state will be different and your teen should follow all of the laws that apply to them without fail.

This may include:

- Logging all practice hours required before taking their driver's road test.
- Driving only to and from school or an after school job.
- Restrictions for driving past a certain time at night or with unlicensed passengers in the car.
- If you allow your teen to slide in any of these areas, you are [modeling](#) to them that the rules of the road do not matter.

Financial Responsibility

Generally, when teenagers have to put out [their own money](#) they take responsibility a little more seriously.

If your teen has a job, considering allowing them to pay for their own car insurance. In the least, make them pay for their own gas and the occasional oil change or car wash.

It is okay to help them out, but you should not pay for everything. Spending money is part of driving and owning a car!

Passenger Safety

Explain to your teen the responsibility they have for the passengers in their car.

While accidents happen, many are preventable by simply following the traffic laws. The guilt of having an accident when you are fooling around behind the wheel is not something that anyone wants to live with. Your teen will understand that.

They may think you are making too much out of it. This is normal immaturity and why many graduated licensing programs include a rule about no friends being in the car for the first couple of months.

Other Drivers

Explain to your teen the responsibility they have to other drivers on the road. Teens need to know that the road is a shared place. Remind your teen of this fact often.

When you are weaving in and out of the traffic, talking on your [cell phone or texting while driving](#), not paying attention to street signs or speeding, you are not being considerate of other drivers.

Have the Responsible Driver Conversation Often

Driving is one of the biggest steps toward maturity and independence for teens. Continue to talk to them about safe driving even as they get older.

More experienced [seventeen-](#) and [eighteen-year-old teens](#) need reminders too and you will continue doing your best to keep your teenager safe on the road

Teen Cell Phone Use While Driving

How to Get Them to Stop Getting Distracted

[Driving teens](#) who fail to put their full attention on the road end up in accidents. It is this simple, distracted driving leads to delayed reaction times, lane swerving and other risky driving behaviors - all of which cause accidents. Teenagers know this, but they aren't thinking about it when their [best friend](#) sends them a text or calls them as they are driving down the road. They want to read the text or answer the call. They think they can do both and with the motivation right there, they try.

Currently, the National Safety Council estimates that at least 23 percent of all traffic crashes every year involve cell phone use. An estimated 1.2 million crashes each year involve drivers using cell phones for conversations and at least 100,000 additional crashes can be related to drivers who are texting. What about just teens? A national survey conducted by the Ad Council found that teens text much more than adults while driving. As a matter of fact, 82 percent of drivers 16-24 years old have admitted to reading a text message while driving.

So how do we get our teens to recognize the problem and stop the behavior? We have to employ our parenting skills using [open communication](#) and [fair and firm discipline](#). By being involved in our teenager's [decision making](#) process when it comes to using their cell phone while they are driving, they will be better equipped to [make the right choice](#).

Keeping Teens from Texting When Driving

First, parents should know that there is a way to check up on your teen when it comes to cell phone use. The most definitive way to know your teen isn't texting while driving is to check the use rates using your cell phone provider's website. When you look at the detailed bill, you can see when the phone is in use. Comparing those times with the times your teen is driving a car will let you know if they are [texting](#) while driving.

But as parents, we don't want to always be investigating whether or not our teens are listening to us and doing what we have asked them to do. We want to be able to talk to our teens about the dangers of cell phone use while driving, [set the rules](#) together and trust our teenagers will choose to follow through with our [expectations](#). This helps us gain trust in our teens and helps their ability to accept the [responsibility](#) of having a cell phone and the use of a car. And our teenagers want that from us, as our trust in them helps them build confidence and gain more independence. So how can a parent know that their teen isn't texting or using their cell phones while driving while not always checking up? By setting up an action plan with their teen using these steps:

1. Talk to your teen using clear communication about the issue of driving and cell phone use. Let them know why you feel it is important enough an issue to address and the rules you expect them to follow.
2. Make it clear that there are consequences for not following them - both natural and logical consequences.
3. Be fair and let your teen in on the fact that there is a way for you to check up on them that you will use from time to time, but that you trust they will make the right choices.

Important Points to Remember

- You should take some time with this conversation and not allow it to be taking place as your teen is trying to walk out of the door.
 - To best ensure that your teen isn't tempted to text while driving, the rule should state that while they are behind the wheel, their cell phone should be off. This includes times they are at stop lights or in a parking lot - anytime the car is on the cell phone should be off.
 - Give your teen some input when thinking of fair and logical consequences in case there is any rule breaking. Get an agreement from your teen, either verbally or use a parenting contract.
 - Follow through with the consequences should your teen be caught texting or using their cell phone while driving. Parents following through with consequences is as important as setting the rules in the first place.
 - If your teen breaks the cell phone and driving rules allow them another chance to gain back your trust and try again after you have followed through with the consequences.
1. If you want some help writing out the rules for your teen, use our [parenting contract: Driving and Cell Phone Use](#).

Research Shows Parents Can Do More to Help Teens Learn to Drive Safely

Updated July 25, 2015.

Young drivers are at the highest risk of car accidents due to their inexperience. And the only way to reduce that risk is for them to gain more experience behind the wheel. However, not all experience is created equal.

Most states have strict rules about how many hours teens need to practice driving with a parent or other licensed driver prior to obtaining a driver's license. However, parents aren't given instructions on how to teach teens to drive and unfortunately, many teens aren't gaining all the skills they need before getting their driver's license.

Research Says Parents are Making Mistakes

Teens with learner's permits have an opportunity to gain a lot of knowledge and skills before obtaining their driver's license. However, most parents don't take full advantage of the opportunity to help teens learn as much as possible during this crucial time, according to a 2014 study published in *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

Researchers discovered that parents tend to offer a lot of practical instruction on vehicle handling. The most common comments parents made included telling teens to slow down as they approached an intersection. Despite offering sound advice on what to do, most parents in the research study missed out on opportunities to teach teens how to recognize potential safety hazards on their own. Simply telling teens what to do didn't necessarily translate into teachable moments.

In order to get the most out of practice behind the wheel, start a discussion with your teen about how to recognize when to apply the brakes. By explaining the cues that signal that it's time to slow down, your teen will become more familiar with handling the vehicle and responding to road hazards independently. These types of conversations can help teens begin to understand the risks of the road.

Steps Parents Can Take to be Good Driving Instructors

Take steps to educate yourself about how to help your teen learn to drive. Teaching your teen necessary skills shouldn't just be about helping your teen pass the driving test – instead, it should focus on helping your teen learn to be a safe driver. Familiarize yourself with the [12 biggest dangers to teen drivers](#).

Before attempting to teach your teen to be a safe driver, brush up on your skills. Perhaps you've developed some unhealthy habits of your own – like rolling through stop signs or speeding. Remember, that it's important to role model good driving habits so you can help your teen learn to be a good driver.

When riding as a passenger with your teen behind the wheel, focus on helping your teen learn. Avoid talking on the phone or listening to the radio, but instead, place all of your attention on being a good teacher. Teach your teen by providing plenty of feedback – both positive and negative- and by discussing ways your teen can improve. Turn mistakes into lessons and help your teen find ways to prevent repeating mistakes again next time.

Promising Results from the Teen Driving Plan Program

[Teen Driving Plan](#) is a program that shows parents how to best teach teens how to drive. The program provides parents with online instruction about how to create a positive learning experience for teens and it offers instruction to parents about how to teach specific driving skills.

A study published in JAMA Pediatrics found that teens whose parents participated in the TDP program were more likely to pass their road test. The study found that 6% of teens whose parents participated in TDP failed their driver tests, compared to 15% from the control group.

The program also helps parents teach teens the skills they need to become safe drivers, many of which aren't necessarily related to their road tests. For example, parents learned how to effectively teach teens to drive in thunderstorms or other adverse road conditions. Researchers plan to continue studying the program to learn whether or not it can decrease car accidents.

Teen Driving Plan provides parents with brief videos to help them teach specific skills. It also offers opportunities for parents to log driving time and to keep track of a teen's skill development. It encourages ongoing instruction and shows parents how to establish concrete goals for each practice session. Demonstrations of the program are available online now and parents can have full access to it by the end of 2014.

7 Essential Tips for Teaching Your Teen How to Drive

Updated January 29, 2015.

After you've had your driver's license for a long time, driving becomes like second nature. As an experienced driver, you don't have to consciously think about when to step on the brake or how hard to turn the wheel. Because those skills come so naturally, it's often hard to teach them to a teen who is learning how to drive.

In fact, much of the research shows that [parents aren't teaching the skills teens to drive](#). That's not to say parents aren't trying hard. Teaching a teen to drive is complicated and most parents aren't trained teachers.

Yet, doing a good job could be a matter of life or death for your teen. It's essential to take every step you can to make sure your teen is prepared to be behind the wheel. Here are 7 essential tips for teaching your teen how to drive:

1. Educate Yourself on the Dangers

While the basic rules of the road have remained the same, some of the dangers to teen drivers have changed over the years. Distracted driving – mainly cellphone use - and driving with passengers are just 2 of the [12 biggest dangers teen drivers face](#). Familiarize yourself with the other major hazards that pose risks to young drivers so you can take steps to reduce the risks.

2. Familiarize yourself with the Skills Teen Drivers Need

Driver's education teaches many of the basic skills, but teens need ongoing practice behind the wheel. Talk to the driver's education instructor to learn more about the specific skills you should be working on with your child. Driving through parking lots, driving at night, and parallel parking are just a few of the skills that often need a lot of practice outside of driver's education. Basic skills, like changing lanes and backing up the vehicle also need to be addressed.

3. Create a Driver Contract

Before you allow your teen to get behind the wheel, [create a driver contract](#). This contract should clearly outline your expectations for safety and responsibility. It should also say what the consequences are for breaking the rules. For example, if your teen tries to answer a cellphone call while behind the wheel, take away driving privileges or electronics privileges as a consequence.

4. Give Clear Instructions

It's easy to get into an argument when you're trying to teach your teen new skills. Before you get started, talk about how you're going to give instructions. For example, rather than say, "right," if your teen asks a question, decide that you'll say, "Correct." Otherwise your response may be mistaken for "turn right." Avoid shouting out useless commands like, "Be careful!" or "Watch out!" Instead, make your instructions as clear as possible.

5. Start Practicing

Start by practicing in an empty parking lot. This will give you an opportunity to get used to being the passenger and you can practice giving your teen instructions. It will also provide your teen with a chance to practice taking your instruction. When you're feeling confident, try driving on a road that won't be heavily travelled. Make your initial practice sessions shorter in length and gradually work your way up to longer driving time and more complicated situations.

6. Go at Your Teen's Pace

Don't feel rushed or pressured to teach your teen everything all at once, even if the time to apply for a driver's license is nearing. Just because your teen is old enough to drive, doesn't mean the maturity level is there. Make it clear that driving is a privilege that needs to be earned by demonstrating specific skills consistently.

7. Sign Your Teen Up For Additional Safety Training

Many communities offer [driver training programs that go beyond driver's education](#). Some of them offer additional classroom instruction while others provide driving simulations to help teens see the dangers of distracted driving first-hand. Look into various programs in your area to see if there are courses available that can help keep your teen safe behind the wheel.