

What You Need to Know Before Your Teen Drives

PARENTS HOLD THE KEYS

The number one reason for teen crashes is driver inexperience – not drinking and driving, speeding, or filling a car with friends . . . although those choices can also be deadly. While parents can set rules and enforce laws that prohibit risky behavior, parents must also realize that they are the ones who must give their teenager the time to practice driving skills and become a mature, safe and courteous driver.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

“All young drivers start out with very little knowledge or understanding of the complexities of driving a motor vehicle. Technical ability, good judgment and experience all are needed to properly make the many continuous decisions, small and large, that add up to safe driving. By making it so easy to get a driver license . . . without requiring an extended period of supervised practice-driving time, we are setting them up for the risk of making a fatal mistake.”

A recent study by the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm noted the following:

“Laws and policies that address distractions by limiting the number of peer passengers and prohibiting cell phone use among novice drivers will help reduce crash rates, but will only address part of the problem. Many crashes will still occur due to the inability of teen drivers to detect and respond to a hazard in time.”

The study noted that parents should focus on helping their teens learn to scan the roadway for hazards during driving practice sessions. Parental reinforcement of basic driving skills and good decision making will lead to safe driving habits that will last a lifetime.

Each year, approximately 100 high school students are killed and thousands more are injured on Virginia’s roadways. Hospitalization and rehabilitation costs, lost time from school, and other costs associated with long-term injuries create substantial emotional, physical and financial problems for students, their families and communities.

Parents and families – not the school – are in the best position to encourage responsible behavior and have a sustained effect on minimizing risks faced by inexperienced drivers.

PARENTS: BE A GOOD EXAMPLE!

- Always wear your safety belt
- Correct your own unsafe driving habits
- Know Virginia traffic laws
- Obey speed limits
- Don’t talk on your cell phone
- Don’t use other electronic devices
- Don’t multitask while driving
- Don’t eat or drink behind the wheel
- Set your GPS before beginning your trip

KNOW TEEN DRIVING LAWS . . . FOR TEEN DRIVERS UNDER 18

- Require seatbelt use
- No driving after midnight*
- Only one passenger allowed*
- No texting and driving
- No talking on the cell phone*
- Prohibit alcohol and drug use and riding with others under the influence (Anyone younger than 21 with a blood-alcohol concentration of .02% percent or higher will lose his/her license for a year)

*Some exceptions – know the law!

TIPS FOR COACHING YOUR TEEN DRIVER

- Follow the Virginia Department of Education’s required 45-Hour Teen/Parent Driving Guide
- Establish a contract allowing your teen to earn the privilege to drive
- Focus on the driving task and leave family issues at home
- Mark your calendar for practice times and remain consistent
- Stay calm, rational, upbeat and engaged
- Reinforce new driving techniques
- Ensure that your teen makes safety and instrument adjustments before driving
- Offer coaching comments that are positive and not judgmental
- Don’t use practice time to discipline your teen driver about other matters
- Make sure your teen has his/her learner’s permit, vehicle registration card and insurance information

ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Scientists now know that the decision-making portion of the teenager's brain is not mature and the impulse control portion of the brain does not physically mature until about age 25.

As a result, teenagers often fail to realize that fast driving, texting while driving, drinking, drag racing and having too many passengers are dangerous activities. Teenagers need active parental supervision, especially where driving is concerned!

In addition, teens often don't recognize themselves as inexperienced drivers. A study by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia found that 60% of teens believe inexperience heavily influences safety, but only 15% consider their peers to be inexperienced. "This contradiction is quite dangerous, considering this sample of teens is almost exclusively comprised of inexperienced, novice drivers," the study stated. Further, many teens believe that getting a license automatically makes them experienced.

**/Focus Forward
/Buckle-up
/Slow Down**

RESOURCES

Partners for Safe Teen Driving is an educationally focused community health initiative designed to educate parents about what they can do to better prepare their teenagers for driving. Partners include:

Prince William County Public Schools
Virginia Department of Education
Virginia State Police
Department of Motor Vehicles

Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles Applying for a Learner's
www.dmv.virginia.gov/webdoc/citizen/drivers/applying_learners.asp

45-Hour Parent/Teen Driving Guide
www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/driver_education/parent_teen_driving_guide.pdf

Six reasons teenagers have automobile crashes or are seriously injured:

- 1. Driver inexperience**
 - Practice with your teen driver.
 - Have your teen learn to drive in all situations: on the highway, at night, and in different weather conditions.
- 2. Use of electronic devices - cell phones, GPS, iPods, DVD players, etc.**
 - Turn off cell phones while driving. In emergency situations, pull to the side of the road to seek help.
 - Don't text while driving – IT'S THE LAW!
- 3. Driver distractions**
 - Give the road your full attention.
 - Don't let distractions get in the way of safe driving.
- 4. Excessive speed**
 - Drive the posted speed limit.
 - Plan your time so that you aren't speeding to get somewhere.
 - Realize there are consequences of driving too fast for hazardous road conditions.
 - Maintain proper following distance and time. Don't tailgate!
- 5. Not buckling up**
 - Use seatbelts every time you get in a car.
 - Remind all passengers to buckle up before you begin to drive.
- 6. Use of alcohol and illegal drugs**
 - Never drive when you have been drinking and never use illegal drugs!
 - Never drive if you have taken any prescription or over-the-counter medicines that can cause drowsiness!

GET THE FACTS!

**PARTNERS FOR SAFE
TEEN DRIVING**
A COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE

www.SafeTeenDriving.org

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