

Teen Drivers. Honest Talk. Real Solutions.

A Handbook for Parents



Provided through an alliance between State Farm®
and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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Traffic crashes | No. 1 killer of teens

Crashes are more common among young drivers than any other age group. With 1 in 4 crash fatalities in the United States involving a 16- to 24-year-old, the first six months after getting a license are the most dangerous times for any driver, and risk remains high during the first year. Until young drivers turn 25, their crash risk remains two to three times higher than for adults.

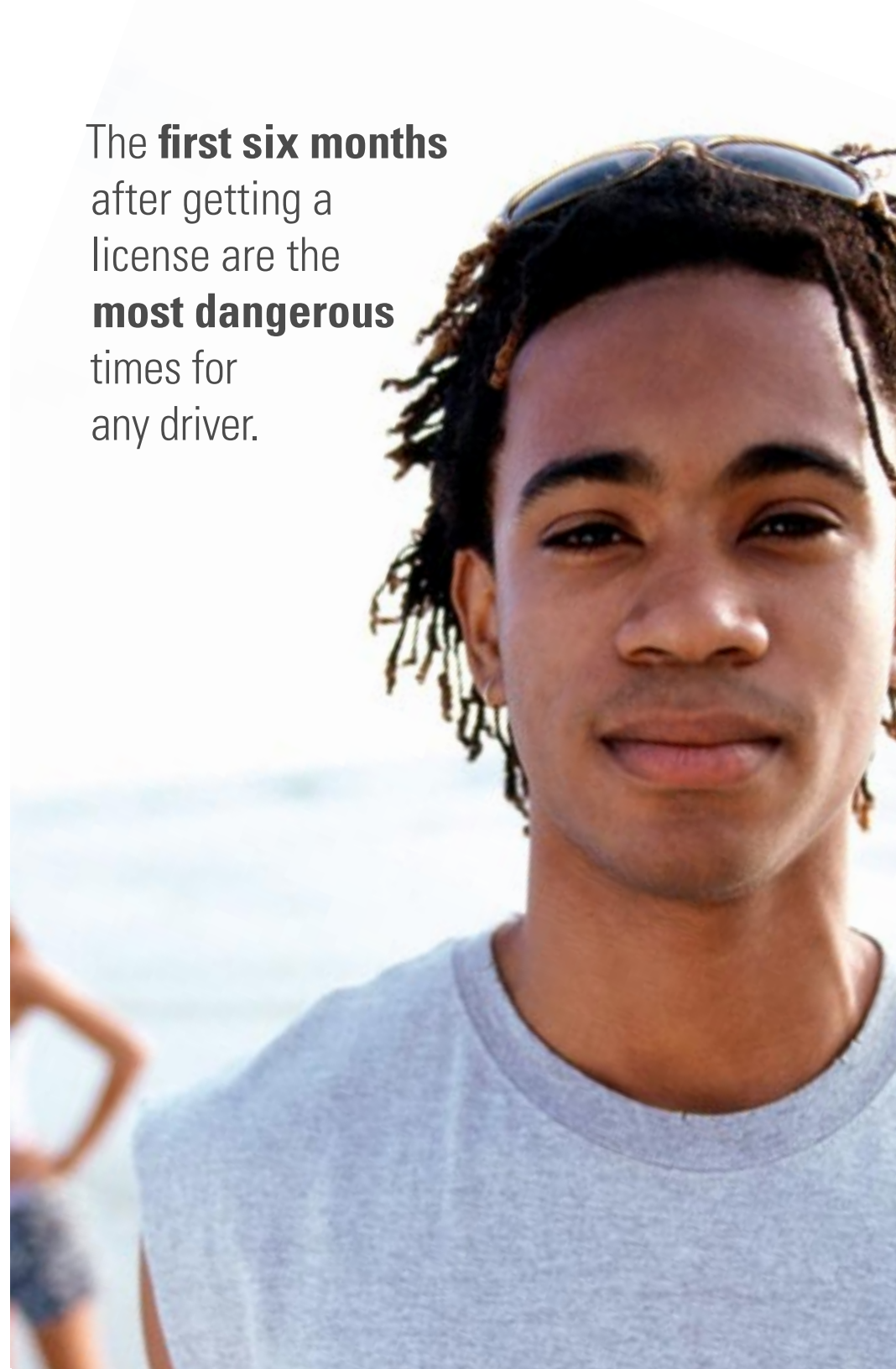
In an effort to reduce crashes among young people, State Farm Insurance Companies® and The Center for Injury Research and Prevention at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) co-developed a multi-year, teen-centered research initiative to help young drivers develop safe, smart driving behaviors and skills. An important, early component of this research was the National Young Driver Survey.

In addition, we co-sponsored a panel of international experts and assembled a team of researchers from CHOP and the University of Pennsylvania to determine the best ways to help parents and educators prepare new drivers for a lifetime of safe driving.

We will continue to turn our research into action with interventions designed to reduce crashes and save lives.

The information in this booklet provides a glimpse of the information available at www.chop.edu/youngdrivers. Please visit this site for a complete list of resources and to view our research report, "Driving: Through the Eyes of Teens."

The **first six months** after getting a license are the **most dangerous** times for any driver.



Quick tips | keep young drivers safe

Set the example.

One of the toughest and most important rules to adhere to is “practice what you preach.” This starts long before your teen ever gets a license. If you don’t want your teen talking on a cell phone or eating while driving, don’t do those things when your teen is riding with you. Always buckle your seat belt before you start the car. Make sure you’re not speeding or tailgating. Try not to drive if you’re angry or tired.

Practice, practice, practice.

The single most important thing you can do to help your teen stay safe on the roads is to allow as much supervised practice behind the wheel as possible.

Keep it interesting.

Varying the routes, time of day, and driving conditions will ensure the new driver in your family gains confidence in a wide range of driving situations.



Gradually introduce new privileges.

Once young drivers receive their license, it may be tempting to let them drive where they want, when they want, and with whomever they want. But research shows that night driving, driving with passengers, and driving without a destination are all factors that contribute to high crash rates. Remember to set ground rules before your teen driver is licensed.

No passengers for at least six months.

Research shows that a teen’s risk of being involved in a crash increases exponentially with each peer passenger in the car. Until you’re sure your teen can manage passengers and other distractions responsibly, insist that no driving be done unless an adult is present. Then, start by allowing only one passenger and gradually increasing the number of teen passengers allowed in the car. Teach your teen that it’s okay to tell passengers, “Please don’t distract me while I’m driving.”

Daytime driving for at least six months.

Teens’ crash risk increases at night. For the first six months, your teen shouldn’t drive after 10 p.m. After this, gradually allow later driving – perhaps by half-hour increments.

It’s best to wait on buying teens their own car.

It’s not recommended that teen drivers be immediately given a car of their own. For the first year or so, share the family car (a later-model, mid-sized to large sedan is safest). This allows parents to control access to the vehicle – which makes it easier to agree on conditions of use (wearing a seat belt, no passengers, no cell phone, responsibility for gas/repairs, etc.).

Teach your teen how to “scan” for hazards.

One of the most common problems young drivers have is scanning their surroundings for potential hazards. The tendency is to look only as far as the car in front of them, in effect “blinding” them to road conditions further ahead, and reducing their space to react to hazards. During your supervised driving practice, remind the driver to keep an eye on the traffic several cars ahead and to the sides, looking for brake lights, traffic signals, roadblocks, pedestrians, or emergency vehicles.

Parents | keep young drivers safe

Believe it or not, your kids do take your guidance and opinions to heart.

Parents can feel encouraged that the majority of teens across the country who participated in the National Young Driver Survey said parents influence their driving behavior more than anyone else. The majority of teens in our survey were taught how to drive by their parents, whom they considered far more helpful than anyone else in mastering this task.

There is strong evidence to suggest a parent's role should extend beyond that of teacher to that of monitor and enforcer of consequences. Parents can be particularly influential in enforcing rules on cell phone use, passengers, and financial responsibility for vehicle maintenance.

Teens with State Farm insurance can use this handbook with the Steer Clear® Program.

You don't need professional experience to teach your teenager to drive. It's more important for you to be there as a guide as your teen practices. You can monitor progress, then gradually expose your teen to more complex driving situations when ready.

If your teen doesn't feel comfortable behind the wheel, consider some professional lessons to kick things off. In fact, 34 percent of American teenagers reported having more than one type of driving instruction, which included private and school-based education, and training in the classroom and behind the wheel. You may even want to join your teen on the lesson to observe how the instructor gets things started.

It's important to map out a plan ahead of time, giving new drivers a chance to master basic skills – like managing a vehicle in traffic – as well as more complex skills. These skills include learning safe following and stopping distances, and how to constantly scan road conditions by looking far ahead and to the sides.

It helps to discuss goals with your teen and lay them out in the form of a parent/teen driving agreement. Also, don't be put off by the number of supervised driving hours required for your son or daughter to become fully licensed. In the National Young Driver Survey, most teens reported they drive between one and two hours a week.

A year of practice at this rate should be just about enough to get your teen road-ready.

Except for the first few hours it will take for your teen to master the basics, it's best to get that experience in everyday situations. Once your teen receives a learner's permit, have him or her drive everywhere you go together. These everyday situations provide the variety teens need to develop into safe drivers.

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Coaching guide | driving lesson timeline

While many parents don't feel prepared to take on the role of driver's education instructor or supervisor, this responsibility does fall to parents most of the time. It's common for parents to feel nervous that they're not qualified; you might recall your own days of learning to drive as being stressful and want to avoid a high-tension situation.

Your main role is not so much as an instructor, but as a supervisor who can help your teen to get many and varied hours of practice driving before he or she is on the road alone.

With a little advance planning, and by using the principles behind your state's graduated driver licensing law as guideposts, you can often avoid flaring tempers and help your teen transition safely from supervised to independent driving.

This section provides a sample lesson time line and a list of things to discuss with your teen before he or she takes the wheel. Remember, your kids have been learning driving behavior for years, by watching you, so you have already started teaching.

Before the learner's permit.

It's never too early to start teaching your kids about safe driving. Even before your teen gets a learner's permit, you can start using your time in the car together as an opportunity to get him or her thinking like a driver and talking about how to be safe.

Be a good role model.

Demonstrating the safe driving behaviors you want your kids to develop is the first step in preparing them for the road. There are plenty of "teachable moments" for you to talk about safe driving with your kids, starting as early as age 13, when they are old enough to sit next to you in the front seat.

Drive home the message on distractions.

- Point out drivers who are doing things like talking on cell phones and explain why that is unsafe.
- Teach your teen that it's okay to tell passengers, "Please don't distract me while I'm driving."
- Practice what you preach: pull over to use your cell phone or have your passenger answer it instead.
- Don't change CDs or the radio or reach for a map. Pull over and explain the need to devote your full attention to the road.

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Use this checklist:

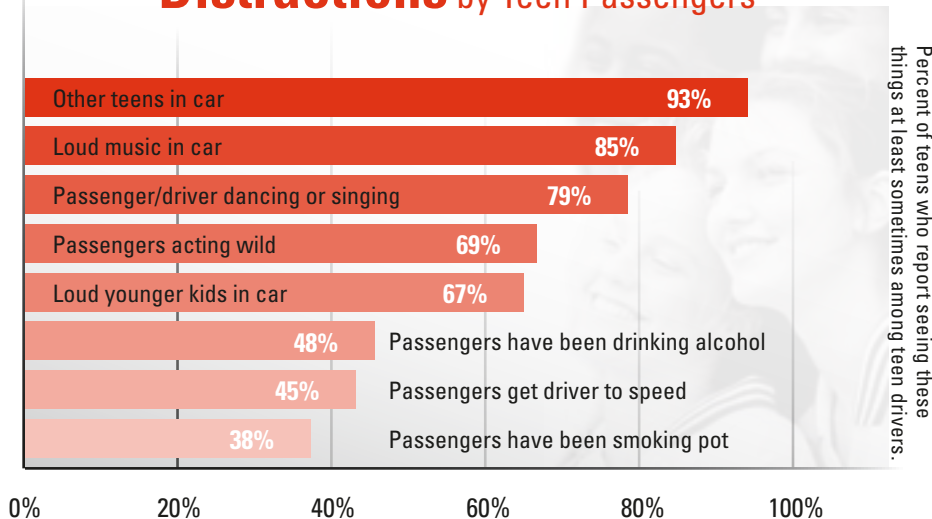
- Wear a seat belt on every trip and insist that passengers also wear theirs.
- Come to a complete stop at stop signs and signals.
- Keep a safe following and stopping distance.
- Obey the posted speed limit.
- Use your turn signal for changing lanes and when turning.
- Treat other drivers with courtesy.
- Avoid distractions that call your attention from the road.
- Talk with your teen about the consequences of unsafe behaviors and other hazards that are common for a new driver.

Make sure the risks are known.

Risks due to age and inexperience.

Hazard perception is a particular problem for young drivers. Teenagers have not yet developed the ability to “scan” far ahead and to the sides as they drive, and they do not detect hazards like pedestrians or roadside objects as fast as adults do. They might not respond as effectively from the time they see the hazard through the time needed to respond.

Distractions by Teen Passengers



Risks due to driving conditions or situations.

Driving with passengers at night, in poor weather, or while distracted by the radio or cell phone are situations that increase teens’ risk for a crash. Ninety-four percent of teens in the National Young Driver Survey reported that seeing distracting behavior from teen passengers was common; nearly half said seeing teen passengers urge the driver to speed was common.

Distractions are a particularly dangerous risk factor for new drivers. Research has shown that, as a rule of thumb, their eyes should not leave the road for more than two to three seconds at a time.

Encourage your teen to drive more cautiously when it’s dark or raining, and when the road conditions are poor, and to leave greater distance between his or her vehicle and the next car in front. This increases reaction time, should the car in front stop or slow down unexpectedly.

Risks due to driver behavior.

Not wearing seat belts, drinking and driving, speeding, using a cell phone, and carrying other teen passengers (even just one!) all greatly increase a young driver’s crash risk. They can often mean the difference between a minor crash and a serious or even fatal one.

Talk about the risks and consequences of these behaviors, and discuss what the penalties will be if your teen doesn’t follow the rules, such as removing certain driving privileges. Teens who are more likely to take risks off the road are also more likely to take part in risky behavior on the road – where it can be deadly.

Preparing for the first lesson – talk before you drive.

Your teen has received a learner’s permit and is ready to start logging those practice hours. It’s important to address the most basic ground rules ahead of time, so you both know what to expect. This will limit misunderstandings and conflicts once you’re in the car.

Keep emotions in check: Agree to time-outs.

Try not to argue with one another in stressful moments, but chances are it will happen. So let your first rule be to take a time-out if emotions rise. Pull over to discuss what he or she did (both right and wrong), and listen to your teen's point of view. Work it out, take time to calm down, and then get started again.

This is also a good time to talk about the dangers of driving when you're upset, sad, or drowsy. Drowsy driving, in particular, is a common problem that's often overlooked and is just as dangerous as driving drunk.

Establish clear guidelines: Stop means stop.

A lot of parents don't think about how their instructions might sound to their teen. For example, if you just say "stop" as you pull up to a stop sign, the driver might step hard on the brake rather than slow to a stop. So settle on something like, "Slow to a stop at the sign," and you might avoid an argument. Distinguish between when you want your teen to "ease off" (or slow down only a little by easing off the brake) versus to "slow down" by applying the brakes more firmly.

Plan the route.

Before each practice session or trip, plan the route. This not only prepares you to review the directions, it also allows you to address things you may encounter on the trip (a 4-way stop, a pedestrian area, or places where it may be slippery). Thinking about the route ahead of time also allows you to be sure that the trips are varied. Make sure you take main roads whenever possible. They are safer than local back streets where unexpected hazards may arise.

Beginning driving lessons.

Once your son or daughter receives a learner's permit, you can begin to sit in the passenger seat. An empty parking lot where the new driver can get a feel for the car and learn to operate the controls can be a good place to start, since there is no pressure to deal with other traffic.

It might also help you both feel more comfortable to start with a professional lesson or two to learn some basic skills. Remember it's up to parents to make sure new drivers get the amount of practice they need in preparation to drive independently.

Many young drivers spend as few as 10 hours or less practicing with an experienced driver before going for their license. Research suggests many more hours of supervised driving are needed in order to expose teen drivers to a wide variety of driving conditions before they are ready for independent driving.

Research shows that the type of experience gained during practice driving tends to be more varied in terms of length, time of day, road types, and driving speeds than that with professional instructors, and offers a broader, more protective experience.

If you think **your teen needs more time** and practice before driving alone, talk to him or her about the reasons why.



Once you're confident your teen can manage the basics of vehicle control, make him or her the primary driver each time you ride together. Expose new drivers to increasingly complex driving conditions so they get as much practice as possible under conditions they will eventually be navigating alone. You will find that if you let your teen drive for everyday activities, like running errands, he or she can quickly gain more than 100 hours of practice – a strong base before driving independently.

Following are different practice driving situations for you and your teen, going from easiest to hardest. Once you are both comfortable that your teen can manage one type of road in dry, daylight conditions, move on to mastering driving at night and also in rain, snow, or fog. In doing this, your teen can see how road conditions can change with weather and lighting.

The first hours: A tour of the vehicle

The first lesson should focus on making sure the driver is knowledgeable and comfortable with the vehicle and its controls.

Review the controls and features of the car. Make sure your teen knows how each of these work:

- Dashboard controls
- Steering wheel and seat adjustment
- Mirror adjustment
- Turn signals
- Headlights
- Safety features like air bags and seat belts
- Wipers
- Emergency lights
- Parking brake/release
- Starting/turning off the engine
- Gas, brakes (especially ABS)
- Warning indicator lights on dashboard (such as low fuel, oil, temperature indicator)

Also, be sure to show your teen where the registration, insurance card, and car manual are located.

Get a feel for the vehicle.

Continue the first few hours of instruction by having your teen practice applying gas and brakes, turning, and backing up.

As you see your teen beginning to master each of these, take note and make the situation a little more complex next time. For example, instead of just stopping and starting, have your teen pull into and out of a parking spot.

It can take several outings to learn how to get from point A to point B, and to figure out how much pressure to apply to the brakes to stop or how far to move the steering wheel to turn.

This is also a good time to remind your teen driver to pay attention to his or her surroundings:

- Look ahead and to the sides
- Check mirrors
- Scan continuously for hazards
- Teach your teen to keep a clear "safety space" around the car so that there is room to react to any hazards. The further he or she "hangs back" from the vehicle in front, the better and further your teen will be able to see and be ready to react to changing traffic conditions.

Take it for a spin in low-speed, low-traffic areas.

Once your teen is comfortable with the basic operation of the car, take your lessons to quiet streets where he or she can practice staying on one side of the road, anticipate cars exiting driveways, and learn to pull up to a stop sign.

For the next several lessons, stick to roads that have slower speed limits (under 35 mph). Emphasize that the posted limit is only a guide for an acceptable speed in excellent conditions. He or she must adjust and drive even slower in poor weather, heavy traffic, or areas where there are a lot of pedestrians.

Beginner skills checklist

Vary the routes to practice the following:

- Turns: speed and use of signals
- Braking smoothly: gradually slowing to a stop
- Accelerating smoothly: steadily increasing to a safe speed within the posted limit
- Approaching intersections controlled by stop signs or lights
- Determining right of way
- Single-lane and multi-lane roadways (low speeds)
- Changing lanes
- Maintaining appropriate speed
- Scanning for and identifying hazards
- Keeping a safe following distance
- Sharing the road with cyclists, pedestrians, school buses
- Driving in a school zone
- Reacting to an approaching emergency vehicle
- Using turning lanes

As your new driver starts to master these skills, pay attention to which ones he or she is confident with. As you both become more comfortable, continue to expose your teen to different times of day, levels of traffic, and weather conditions on familiar roads.

At this point, your teen has mastered the basics of operating the car and now needs lots of practice getting used to the road. For the next several hours of driving practice, stick to low-speed, low-traffic roads. Try to take a different route each time to be sure your teen is getting the variety needed to become a truly safe driver.

A teenager is more than 20 times more likely to be in a crash while transitioning from supervised driving to driving alone.




Advanced driving lessons

Driving on a multi-lane highway for the first time can be scary. Start your teen out by driving at quieter times of the day to practice merging into traffic, staying in the lane, and using higher speeds and safe following distances without the added stress of rush-hour traffic. Once you are both comfortable with that, gradually move on to busier traffic situations.

Before heading out onto the highway, prepare your new driver for:

- Higher speeds that call for longer stopping distances
- The need to check blind spots before changing lanes
- Driving near large trucks
- Anticipating interchanges by reading signs
- Allowing a “safety space” around you, in the event you need to pull off the road for another vehicle or debris
- Looking for traffic stopped or slowing ahead



61 percent of 9th through 11th graders **share the vehicle** they drive most often with someone else.

Advanced skills checklist

Skills a new driver needs to master while in high-speed, high-traffic conditions:

- Merging into traffic
- Identifying road signs and exits
- Toll booths
- Passing and being overtaken
- Maintaining proper speed
- Being courteous to others
- Keeping a safe following distance

The final stretch: Advanced challenges

Difficult driving conditions are dangerous for all drivers, but are extremely hazardous for new drivers. After you and your teen feel confident with his or her ability to handle each driving situation in daylight and good weather, make sure your teen has plenty of opportunities to drive each type of road at night and in rain, snow, and fog. Discuss using features like the defroster, fog lights, and bright headlights.

Until both you and your teen driver are comfortable with driving in “degraded” conditions, he or she should not do it without supervision, even if the law says it’s allowed.

How do I know when my teen is ready to drive alone?

You know your teen best. Your instincts are probably the best judge of all. Remember, even if your teen is legally old enough to get a license, it’s your decision whether or not he or she is ready.

Think about these questions:

- Has my teen had enough practice, in varying conditions, so we are both confident with his or her ability to handle most situations?
- Has my teen shown he or she can detect hazards and react to them quickly?
- Have I noticed that scanning for hazards has become habit for him or her?
- Does my teen always wear a seat belt and remind others to do so?
- Does my teen not use his or her cell phone or text message while driving?
- Does my teen wait to pull over to handle distractions or situations that take his or her eyes away from the road? Do I think he or she will act the same when I'm not with him or her?
- Does my teen speed or drive aggressively?
- Will my teen know to pull over if upset, frustrated, or angry?
- Has my teen exhibited responsibility in other areas of his or her life and do I trust him or her to drive my car responsibly?
- Do I have a driving contract with my teen?

If you think more time and practice is needed before driving alone, talk to your teen about the reasons why. One possible way to handle it is to make a deal that your teen may get a license, but you don't want him or her driving alone in certain situations. These are all things you can address ahead of time with the parent/teen driving agreement.

Now that your teen is licensed

When your teen is ready for independent driving, make sure you set and review house rules before trips in order to avoid risky conditions, especially during the first six months. Place limits on situations that increase risks, such as:

- Carrying multiple passengers (for at least the first six months of licensure, no passengers under 25 should be allowed without an adult present)
- Driving in poor weather
- Driving on certain roads
- Driving at night (driving alone after 10 p.m. should not be allowed until after the first six months of independent driving)

Graduated driver licensing (GDL)

Nearly all states have some components of graduated driver licensing (GDL) in place to help protect teens from serious accidents during the first several months of driving. Early evidence is strong that a model GDL law can go a long way toward protecting teen drivers if parents actively enforce the restrictions. These laws work by limiting a young driver's exposure to high-risk situations and by requiring more hours of supervised practice before driving independently.

Many parents don't realize the learning period for new drivers – meaning supervised driving time – is the absolute safest their teens will ever be behind the wheel. On the other hand, the first few months of independent, unsupervised driving is the most dangerous period. A teenager is more than 20 times more likely to be in a crash while transitioning from supervised driving to driving alone. GDL laws are designed to lessen the danger during that period. To learn more about the GDL laws in your state, please see the resources section on page 26.

The research

Research suggests the more supervised practice young drivers have in varied driving situations, the safer they are once they begin to drive independently. One study found that drivers who got their learner's permit early and had closer to two years of practice driving experience were less likely to have crashes once they received their license, as compared with drivers who had six months or less of practice.

Based on research like this, GDL laws require a minimum period of supervised driving, then relax to allow restricted independent driving (often during daylight hours, with no passengers), until the teen is finally ready to drive independently without restrictions. Sections in GDL laws vary from state to state, but following the recommendations listed below is a good place to start as you approach your new role as driving supervisor:

- A minimum of six months of practice driving; preferably 12 months
- No driving during nighttime hours without an adult present for at least six months
- No driving with any passengers under 25 without an adult present for at least six months, then allowing only one passenger under 25 for the following six months
- Absolutely no alcohol consumption (a zero Blood Alcohol Concentration [BAC])

Choosing a car | when the time is right

Many parents want to give their young drivers a car as soon as they have a license. Cost considerations aside, it's not a good idea for newly licensed drivers to immediately have their own car.

You may be sending your teen a message that having a car and driving immediately is a right he or she is entitled to rather than earned as experience is gained. It's a much safer and wiser plan to have your teen establish a safe driving record before giving free reign of the roadways. Even if your teen has saved money and can fully pay for the car, it's not the best practice in terms of safety and risk.

All new drivers are at the highest risk of getting into a crash during the first six months after receiving their license. Don't be in a rush to give your teen the privilege of independent driving in all conditions and situations right away and not in his or her own vehicle.

We know you spend a lot of time and effort driving your children around and many look forward to their teen being able to help with some of these responsibilities. But it's worth waiting a few months more to keep your teen and your car safe!

Most parents will hear the familiar plea: "Everyone else's parents give them a car" or, "If I pay for it myself, what's the problem?" Stand tough on this one: Your teen's safety and that of any passengers hangs in the balance. It's just not worth it.

Guidelines on cars.

When the time is right to help your teen pick out a car, here are some guidelines on the best types of vehicles:

- Avoid cars that have a sporty, performance-type image. These vehicles can encourage young drivers to speed and test their performance. SUVs and pickup trucks are also not the best choice for a teenager. While they may seem a safe choice because of their size and weight, they are actually more likely to roll over in a crash. A teen driver's high crash rate and an SUV's high rollover rate can be a deadly combination.
- Later model mid- and full-size passenger cars are good choices since they offer sufficient weight as well as updated safety features. Small cars offer less crash protection because of their size/weight. Look for a car that has other air bags in addition to the standard driver and passenger ones; side and curtain air bags add an extra measure of crash protection.
- Other features that might benefit your teen are Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), as well as intelligent seat belt reminder systems that make it difficult or annoying to drive without all occupants wearing their seat belts.
- When you find a car that seems like a good choice, be sure to check safety ratings with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration or the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

A word about finances.

From the National Young Driver Survey, we learned that 61 percent of 9th through 11th graders share the vehicle they drive most often with someone else. Only about half of them said they're responsible for fuel costs; however, only about 25 percent were responsible for paying any maintenance or repair costs.

Other research shows that awareness of the existence of monetary fines for traffic offenses can be a strong incentive for improving driving safety. Likewise, parents can use the costs associated with driving as a bargaining point. For example, you can agree to cover gas as long as your son or daughter adheres to the terms of the parent/teen driving agreement.



Resources

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (GDL Information)

www.saferoads.org

American Academy of Pediatrics

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org>

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

www.cdc.gov

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

www.chop.edu/youngdrivers

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (GDL Information)

www.iihs.org

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

www.nhtsa.gov

National Safety Council

www.nsc.org

State Farm Project Ignition

www.sfprojectignition.com



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