

What We Know Works (and Doesn't) to Change Teen Driving Behaviors



What does work:

- Pre-testing messages to understand how target audiences will respond.
- Communicate information the audience does not already know.
- Combine communication strategies with other proven prevention strategies, such as advocacy to change/enforce laws that will encourage behavior change.
- Use interactive demonstrations, individual reflection and small group dialogue to encourage people to *experience* what you want them to understand, consider if and why they should care and what they want to do about it. Include consideration and discussion of barriers to changing behaviors and problem solving to overcome those barriers. consider
- Role play and other opportunities to build skills to resist peer pressure to behave in risky ways and/or skills to encourage and hold peers accountable for the behaviors we are promoting.
- Engage parents to set limits and discuss teen driver safety issues with their teens. Parent/youth driving contracts can be effective tools in this endeavor if they are specific, freely and willingly agreed upon without coercion, regularly discussed and consequences are enforced.
- Make it clear that social norms among peers support positive behaviors. Teens often act based on false beliefs about what “everyone else is doing.” Helping teens see that most of their peers and/or the “cool” kids support safe driving behaviors encourages others to do the same.

What doesn't work:

- Slogans that simply *tell* people to behave in a certain way to avoid certain outcomes, without offering meaningful reasons why.



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- Passive messaging via signs, pamphlets, brochures or buttons. These can be effective when appropriately integrated with other strategies. For example, buttons can be an important part of a larger strategy to show that student norms support a particular behavior (e.g. “I voted” stickers or “I gave blood”). Seeing most students wearing buttons or some other symbol to which campaign gives meaning (e.g. a yellow ribbon) conveys that most students support whatever the campaign is promoting. For example, some PI schools did posters showing students buckling up. That can play a role in showing that cool people in the school are doing it, which makes it the cool thing to do. Similarly, pamphlets and brochures can help outline key points a school wants to get across in a campaign, which can play an effective role as an introduction and/or reminder *in conjunction with* a strategies through which students recognize the information as relevant, experience key elements of the message (e.g. how difficult it really is to pay attention to driving while sending a text message), consider what it means to them, and decide what they want to do about it.
- One-way messaging through lectures, PA announcements and PSAs. Attitudes and behaviors are more effectively changed through experience, reflection and dialogue. This includes: providing an opportunity for young people to experience something that produces an “aha!” (e.g. putting on DUI goggles and trying to drive a cart around an obstacle course) *along with* reflection/dialogue/discussion to consider what they experienced, what it means to them, what they want to do about it. If they see reasons why it might be hard to do what they want to do about it, they need a chance to figure out *how* they are going to overcome those obstacles. Again, these one-way message strategies can be affective tools to *remind* people about what they learned through these interactive strategies, and to reinforce the notion that most students in the school support safe driving behaviors.
- Short-term, low-intensity campaigns. Instead, we need campaigns in which attention-getting messages are delivered through multiple strategies regularly, over a long period of time.
- Use of extreme fear or scare techniques. Fear campaigns can work, if the audience believes that: consequences of an action are real *for them*; *and* that they have the power to prevent those consequences. This is difficult to do well. It involves the kind of reflection and discussion described above. It can be a dangerous approach, because when not done well fear appeals can have negative outcomes.