



Teen Summer Survival Guide

The end of the school year marks the start of the deadliest time of the year for teen drivers and passengers – a time when inexperience behind the wheel turns into loss, injury and death for many. Parents can improve their teenagers' chances of staying safe on the road this summer by following these Drive for Life guidelines:

Sign a summer contract with your young driver. Clearly define the expectations and requirements associated with the driving privilege, and the consequences for violating them. Require young drivers to sign a contract accepting the conditions, and stick to them. For a sample contract, visit www.driveforlife.com

Introduce the driving privilege gradually. Allow independent driving only after significant supervised practice, and then for limited amounts of time and in low-traffic situations on familiar roads. Grant other privileges – such as driving for longer periods, on busier roads, at night, in inclement weather, or with passengers – gradually as the driver acquires more experience.

Limit your child from riding with inexperienced drivers. Your child may be in equal or greater danger as a passenger riding with an inexperienced driver: 59 percent of teenage passenger deaths in 2003 occurred in vehicles driven by another teenager. Know who is driving your child, and teach your child to be a good passenger.

Reduce distractions. Cell phones, music, food and passengers all can be deadly distractions. Tell your child not to use a cell phone or eat while driving and restrict music entirely for the first six months of independent driving. Research confirms that the already increased crash risk for teen drivers rises with each additional passenger. Teens should be permitted to drive passengers (other than a supervising adult) only after much experience and practice. Set ground rules and discuss them with likely passengers.

Limit nighttime and weekend driving. Many teens drive at night for the first time in summer, with the night driving privilege often extended all at once. Treat night driving like the new experience it is and allow it independently only after significant supervised night driving. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 42 percent of fatal crashes involving teenagers happened between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. And the later it gets, the greater the chance that alcohol is involved. The risk of crash deaths also increases on the weekend.

Demand that your children obey the law. Parents must insist their children wear safety belts, whether their children are drivers or passengers. Failure to buckle up plays a significant role in teen driving deaths: About two-thirds of teens killed in crashes are not buckled up. Tell your teen to slow down! Teen crashes and violations are more likely to involve speeding, and most fatal crashes occur at high speed. No drinking and driving – ever. Although teens drink and drive less than older drivers, their risk of dying when they do so is far greater because of their relative inexperience with both: Nearly a third of drivers ages 15 to 20 who were killed in car crashes in 2003 had been drinking.

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