

# Teen Driving: A Road Map

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Almost nothing scares parents of teens more than the idea of their son or daughter soon driving. And rightly so: teen drivers have the highest rates of injury and death among all age groups.

Car crashes are the **number one cause of death** among 15- to 20-year-olds in this country. Although drivers in this age group account for only 6 percent of US drivers, they account for 14 percent of fatal crashes, and have a crash rate 4 times greater than drivers 30 to 69 years.

More than **5500** young people die every year in car crashes, and tens of thousands more are injured. There's no glossing over these facts. Adolescents are fundamentally riskier drivers than those who are more experienced, and they generally have less awareness of the world around them, and their vehicle.

However, safety is found in knowledge and involvement; studies have confirmed that the more parents know about teen driving, and the more they are involved in monitoring teens' driving behaviors, the lower the risks. Parents can play an important role in keeping their teens alive and safe.

The following are ways you can help keep teens safe on the road:

- **Be a role model:** If you expect your teen to drive safely, you need to drive safely, too. Always wear your seat belt. Don't drink and drive. Never allow any alcohol or illegal drugs in the car. Don't eat, drink, *or talk on your cell phone*, or do anything else that could distract you from your driving. Stay within the speed limit and obey all traffic signals.
- **Know the laws:** It is important that you know and understand the driver licensing laws, specifically, the restrictions and limitations on teen drivers who have permits and provisional licenses. You must also learn about your own legal responsibilities for providing a good supervised driving experience for your teen. *For Oregon's laws, please see the resource link section at the end of this flyer.*
- **Set specific rules:** Before you let your teen drive, set specific rules that must be followed. At first, the restrictions should be strict. You can gradually relax the rules after your teen has demonstrated safe driving. And the rules you set should depend on the maturity level of your teen. We strongly consider that you and your teen sign the **Parent-Teen Driving Contract** (see the resource links below) and that you join the "**I Promise**" program (see also the resource links).
- **Driving is a privilege, not a right:** Many teens see driving as an inalienable right, guaranteed in their imagined teenage constitution. Parents are advised to remind their teens regularly that driving is instead a privilege, one that can be taken away as a consequence for actions that are reckless, or cause loss of trust.
- **Enforce strict penalties:** Generally, penalties for breaking the contract should match the seriousness of the rule broken. Punishments for reckless driving, such as speeding or drunk driving, should involve loss of driving privileges for an extended period, whereas punishments for driving teen passengers during the restricted period of the first six months might involve loss of driving privileges for one week.
- **Take your teen on the road:** The hours of driving practice in many driver education programs is not enough. Your teen needs a lot more supervised driving practice, and some nighttime driving is important, too. There are books, videos, and classes for parents on how to teach teen drivers. Remember that the first thing you'll need is a lot of patience.
- **Check out the car:** Make sure the car your teen is driving is safe and in good condition. Teens, especially, will be ill-equipped to troubleshoot any problems that arise while driving, or recognize

them, for that matter. If your teen is buying a car, help your teen research safety ratings and find a mechanic to inspect the car. Air bags and lap-shoulder belts in the rear seat are important safety features.

- **Make a tough decision:** If you're concerned that your teen may not be ready to drive, you can prevent your teen from getting a license. All states allow parents to block their teen from getting a license if the teen is thought to be immature or reckless. Consider waiting until at least the 17<sup>th</sup> birthday before signing on to a permit – new teen drivers of age 17 have one-third as many accidents in the first two months of driving as new teen drivers of age 16 years! In most European countries, the driving age is 18 years.
- **Distracted driving is the new drunk driving.** Cell phone use increases the risk of an accident *fourfold*. Texting multiplies the risk by several times again. Oregon law prohibits drivers from using mobile communication devices, like cell phones, while driving. Similar prohibited items include two-way, wireless and texting devices (both hand-held, and hands-free). The only exceptions are if the driver is summoning emergency assistance or engaged in farming activities. If a teen is operating a motor vehicle while using a mobile communication device, it is a Class D traffic violation with a \$97 fine. A conviction is also placed on the driver's record.
- **The greatest danger to a teenage driver is another teen in the car.** The chance of having an accident *doubles* with two teenagers, and *skyrockets* with three or more. Discourage your teen from driving other teens, even after the period of restriction ends. Consider disallowing your teen from using your vehicle unless (s)he agrees never to drive it with friends as passengers.
- **Know the high-risk times and behaviors.** Almost 60 percent of fatal crashes involving teens happen between 9pm and midnight. Two-thirds of crashes happen on weekends. Speed plays a significant role in 40 percent of fatal crashes when boys are driving, and only 25 percent with girls driving. One in four teen drivers routinely fails to use seat belts. And 22 percent of fatal crashes with teen drivers involved alcohol, compared to only 4 percent of non-fatal crashes.

Once your teen has his or her license, *your job has not ended*. Parental monitoring has a significant influence not only over adolescent substance abuse, sexual initiation, delinquency, and aggression, but also over driving safety. Remember that BY FAR the highest risk of crashing is within the first 60 days of driving.

In particular, signing and periodically revisiting a formal, written, driving-related parent-teen agreement with clear parent expectations reduces risky driving among teens, likely by reducing discordance between parent and teen interpretations of expectations and limits.

To protect teens from crashes, parents should set rules and effectively monitor driving behaviors. Engaged parents who are authoritative while supportive, and who ask repeated questions and provide frequent reminders of expectations, have the safest teen drivers.

### **More Resources:**

OR DMV: How To Get A Driver's License: <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/DMV/TEEN/license.shtml>

OR DMV: How To Get An Instruction Permit: <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/DMV/TEEN/permit.shtml>

The Oregon Parent Guide To Teen Driving: <http://www.odot.state.or.us/forms/dmv/7190.pdf>

Road To Getting Your License: [http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/docs/DE/Road\\_to\\_Getting2006.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/docs/DE/Road_to_Getting2006.pdf)

AAP Parent- Teen Driving Contract: [http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR\\_TeenDriver.htm](http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_TeenDriver.htm)

The "I Promise" Program: Safe Teen Driving Initiative: <http://www.ipromiseprogram.com/>

Road Ready Teens Program: <http://www.roadreadyteens.org/>

National Safety Council: [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)

AAA Foundation For Traffic Safety: [www.aaafoundation.org](http://www.aaafoundation.org)