

2011

10 “Must-Dos” to Crash-Proof New Teen Driver



A Free Report from
TeensLearnToDrive.com

Driving is Dangerous

From the time they're very young, kids look forward to the day they can take the keys and drive away in the car. They think about the freedom and the fun of going where they want, with their friends at their side.

The possibility of crashing doesn't even enter their minds although at least 1 in 10 new drivers will crash in their first year. The lucky ones will have fender benders but 6,000 teens will die and 300,000 more will face critical injuries that require surgeries and long-term therapy.

The tragic thing is that most of those **crashes are completely preventable!**

This report gives you 10 simple things you can do to help your teens avoid crashes when possible and minimize injuries if a crash does happen.



Understand that your teens are focused on one thing - *getting their license*; while you are focused on something else – *keeping them safe*. Don't let them cut corners. Follow these tips and be vigilant!

10 Ways to Crash-Proof Your Teen

1. Start With a Good Driving Course

Don't choose the closest school or the cheapest one – at least not for those reasons. Do your homework and find the best course you can. These are some things you should consider:

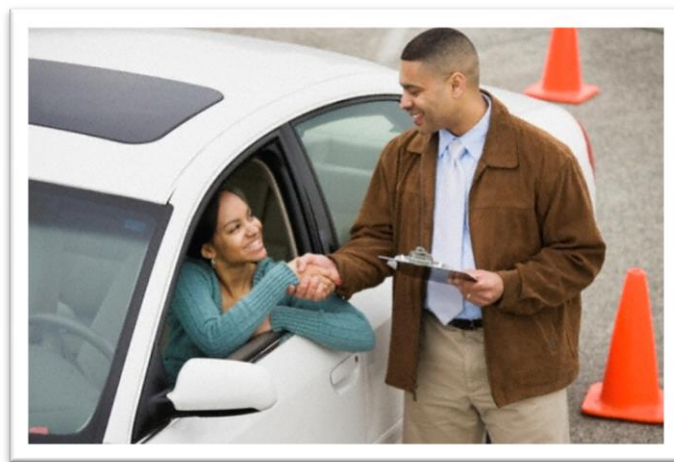
- ▶ Is the driving school licensed?
- ▶ Are the instructors certified? What backgrounds/qualifications do they have?
- ▶ How much time will students spend behind the wheel? Will they be alone in the car with the instructor or will other students be with them?

- ▶ What is the curriculum for the classroom sessions? What methods do they use for teaching? How many hours of training are provided?
- ▶ Check with your insurance company to see which courses will qualify your teen for an insurance discount.

Ask your friends for recommendations. Check the Better Business Bureau to find out about the reputations of the schools.

When you have a list of several possible driving courses, visit each one to see what the facilities are like. If possible, sit in on part of one of the classroom sessions to get a feel for their teaching style.

Then choose the best course. Driving schools can be expensive, but keep in mind that the money you pay will be offset by the money you'll save on insurance.



2. Know the Rules of the Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Program in Your Area

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) programs work and they're saving lives. Find out what the rules are in your area and make sure your teen understands them too.

GDL allows teens to become comfortable driving with limited distractions before additional difficulties are added. Typical programs:

- ▶ Restrict nighttime driving because most crashes happen when it's dark

- ▶ Limit the number of non-family teen passengers because teens are much more likely to crash when they have another teen in the car (and the likelihood of a crash goes up dramatically with each additional teen passenger.)
- ▶ Restrict high speed driving because the worst crashes happen at high speeds and cars are harder to control
- ▶ Support zero tolerance for drugs and alcohol
- ▶ Don't allow cell phone use or texting by the driver

The most restrictive programs are the best so take a look at the restrictions in your area and decide whether they are strong enough to keep your teen safe. If you think they need to be stronger, create your own family rules. (Then do what you can to lobby for stronger rules in your area. Remember: your teen will be driving with other teens who are abiding by those lax rules!)

Talk about the rules with your teen and make sure they understand what you expect from them. This is not a situation where, "I thought you meant..." will do.

Terrible tragedies have occurred when parents allowed their teens to ignore the GDL laws in their state by letting them drive with teen passengers or outside the hours of their driving curfew.

3. Create a Driving Contract with Specific Consequences for Breaking the Rules

You'll find a customizable contract in the "3 Keys to Keeping Your Teen Alive" workbook (available March 2011 through TeensLearnToDrive.com). Alternately you can create your own, using the GDL rules as the baseline.

Be sure to include other items like:

- ▶ Seatbelt use for themselves and passengers
- ▶ What they should do if they get tickets for dangerous driving, speeding or parking
- ▶ Exceeding the speed limit

- ▶ Having drugs, alcohol or weapons in the car
- ▶ Loaning the car

Put all the rules on paper and have your teen initial each one to show they understand and agree to abide by them.

Then detail what the consequences will be if they break the rules. Loss of driving privileges for a specific period of time is a good idea. The consequences need to be strong enough to provide a deterrent.

Formalizing your agreement accomplishes two important things. It shows teens what you expect from them in a very clear way. It also provides them with a reason to do the right thing when they're getting pressured by friends to do something else. They can truthfully answer - "No way! If I do that, I'll lose the keys for 2 months!"

Don't forget to include an "escape clause" in your contract. It would say something like:

"Because we love you and want you to be safe – please call us if you are ever in a position where you don't have a safe way to get home. We will pick you up or arrange a safe ride for you – no matter where or what time. We promise to postpone discussions about the event until the next day when we are all calm and rested.

We would rather pick you up at 3 a.m. across town, than identify your body at the morgue the next day."

Then sign the agreement and have your teen sign it too. Post it in a place where you will all be reminded frequently about your agreement.

4. Think About Who They're Driving With

Don't automatically say yes when your teen asks if they can go out with other teens – especially if one of them is driving.

Of course you want your teen to have fun but the fact is that most teens who die as *passengers* are in cars driven by other teenagers.

Ask a lot of questions about:

- ▶ The driving record of the other driver

Do they have a full license? How long have they been driving? (The first year is the most dangerous.) Have they ever been stopped by the police?

- ▶ Where are they going?

Some events are more likely to involve drugs and alcohol.

- ▶ What is their schedule?

Recreational driving is far more dangerous than purposeful driving (when they have a specific schedule and destination).

- ▶ What route are they taking?



Highways and rural roads are particularly dangerous. Is the driver familiar with the roads they'll be taking? Have they driven them before?

- ▶ Who else will be in the car?

The more teens in the car, the more dangerous the situation.

You might also consider drawing up a Teen-Passenger Contract like the one included in the “3 Keys to Keeping Your Teen Alive” workbook. Include all the items listed above and specify who your teen is allowed to drive with and when. For example, “Can drive to and from school with Sam.”

Sign it with your teen and post it with your Teen Driver Contract.

5. Create a Practice Schedule

Most teen crashes involve driver error because teens are inexperienced drivers. It takes 3 years to gain the reflexive driving skills they need but you can help by giving them lots of structured practice.

Drivers need at least 100 hours of practice in the first year. That works out to about 2 hours per week – which isn't easy in our busy lives. So schedule it.

The “3 Keys to Keeping Your Teen Alive” workbook provides 25 detailed driving lessons that include road practice and “need-to-know” information to make sure you cover all the bases.



If you want to design your own lesson plan, make sure it includes:

- ▶ Driving on various types of roads at the appropriate times including: neighborhood streets, busy streets, parking lots, rural roads, highways, multilane highways.
- ▶ How to navigate near schools, buses, ambulances, trucks, roadwork crews, hospitals, toll booths, bridges
- ▶ How to deal with various types of intersections
- ▶ Driving in various light conditions including morning, dusk and evening
- ▶ Driving at different speeds
- ▶ Parking (parallel, parking lots, underground, etc.)
- ▶ Driving in all kinds of weather including, rain, fog, snow, ice and high winds
- ▶ How to handle emergency situations including flat tires, out-of-gas, fender benders and crashes with injuries

6. Provide a safe, roadworthy vehicle for practice

It's a good idea to use the same vehicle for practice sessions so your teen can get used to it.

Before you get started, have it checked out thoroughly to make sure it's in top condition. Make sure:

- ▶ The brakes are in great condition – ABS are best.
- ▶ The tires have proper pressure and excellent treads.
- ▶ All safety systems are functioning.

If you have a choice - a mid-sized car is best. Very small vehicles are easier to handle but don't provide enough protection. Large vehicles are difficult for anyone to park or maneuver. Pick-up trucks and SUVs are more prone to rollovers. Sports cars are just plain wrong.

7. Keep a log of practice time

A log helps make sure you stay on track and cover all the bases. The “3 Keys to Keeping Your Teen Alive” workbook includes 12 months of driver logs.

If you make your own make sure you include:

- ▶ The date of each session
- ▶ How long you practice
- ▶ Which skills you practice
- ▶ What the daylight and road conditions are
- ▶ A cumulative total of how long you practice

8. Have Key Safety Discussions

In addition to practicing driving skills, there are a lot of things teens need to know before they're ready to drive solo. A lot of the topics are in the news so they know a little about them. They also need good strategies for how to deal with them.

Don't make the mistake of thinking your kids already know this stuff - *even if they tell you they do*. Each of these conversations is so important. I can't tell you how many parents I've talked to who have lost teens in crashes that said their teen ***always*** wore a seatbelt. All it takes is one mistake – to end in tragedy.



So make sure you talk to your teens in depth about:

- ▶ Wearing their seatbelt and making sure their passengers wear them - (An unbelted passenger is deadly too!)
- ▶ Alcohol and driving - (Talk about making a back-up plan before they go out.)
- ▶ Drugs and driving - (Illegal drugs are stupid & dangerous and some prescription drugs are dangerous too.)
- ▶ Using cell phones and texting - (A lot of teens know this is dangerous, but think ***they*** can handle it. Talk about how talking on a cell phone changes what you see on the road.)
- ▶ Drowsy driving - (This is particularly dangerous for young teens and athletes!)
- ▶ Parking lot safety – (Include where to park, where not to park, how to use their remote device etc.)
- ▶ Where to pull over in an emergency – (Include the danger of secluded areas and what to do if they're pulled over by police.)
- ▶ Dealing with unruly passengers – (Talk about specific things they can do if their passengers are doing dangerous things or try to pressure them to do dangerous things.)
- ▶ What to do if they get lost – (Talk about where they can turn around safely, how to read a map, etc.)

- ▶ Planning road trips – (Drowsy driving is a big risk here. Be sure the car is properly packed and has bottled water, first aid kit, appropriate clothing, etc.)
- ▶ Intersection safety – (Girls have the highest rate of crashes in intersections. Make sure you practice, practice, practice – left turns.)
- ▶ How to avoid rollovers – (Be sure to practice how to recover from being forced onto a soft shoulder.)
- ▶ What to do if they're involved in an accident – (Talk about what information they should share, what they shouldn't share or say, how to get witness information, etc.)
- ▶ Sharing the road with pedestrians, bicycles and motorcycles (Talk about who has the right-of-way and what that means.)
- ▶ Crossing railroad tracks (Thousands die on railroad tracks each year because they take risky chances.)
- ▶ Speeding (Be sure to talk about how fast is too fast and why.)
- ▶ Road racing (Be sure to watch the videos from our website about this one.)
- ▶ Road rage (New drivers can be victims of road rage when other drivers get impatient because they aren't moving fast enough. Make sure they know what to do, and what not to do.)
- ▶ Wheelchair parking (Honoring reserved parking is courteous and will save them a lot of money.)
- ▶ How to merge and change lanes on a highway (Be sure to explain the rules and then practice, practice, practice.)
- ▶ Basic car maintenance (Make sure they know how to change a tire, jump a dead battery, etc.)
- ▶ Dos and Don'ts for pumping gas (Be sure to include – how to add windshield washer fluid, check the oil, etc.)

You'll find some great free videos at <http://TeensLearnToDrive.com> that relate to these topics. They're organized to accompany the related sections in the "3 Keys

to Keeping Your Teen Alive” workbook which provides great stories, quizzes and tips for shaping all these conversations.

However, you’re welcome to use them on your own. You’ll find them under the tab called “Video Library”.

9. Monitor your driver

Now that you’ve created your teen contracts and assigned consequences for breaking the rules, you need to make sure the rules are followed.

There are several things you can do.

Certainly you can ask friends and relatives to ‘keep an eye out’ for your new teen driver. Ask them to tell you when they see the car. You’re looking for specific feedback: are they driving at the speed limit? Are they obeying the rules of the road? Are they being courteous to other drivers?

Make it clear you understand your teen needs privacy and you aren’t asking friends to spy for you. You just want feedback – good or bad – on your teen’s driving so you can keep them safe.

There are also some great products available to help. If you are concerned about your teen’s ‘need for speed’ or constant cell phone-use, there are great products available to help. Don’t take the chance that they may be doing something dangerous when they get out of sight. Mistakes can be deadly!

Some monitoring devices are described in depth in the “3 Keys” workbook. You’ll also find links to some terrific products under the ‘Resources’ tab on teenslearntodrive.com.

10. Don’t Buy Your New Driver a Car

It’s much easier to monitor the use of a shared family vehicle. Wait until they have at least a few years of solid driving under their belt before you even think about allowing them to have their own vehicle.

When the time comes to get them a vehicle, consider what stake they should have in it. People respect and protect what they value. And we value things more if we've contributed in some way to procuring them.

And get a sensible, safe vehicle that will provide as much support and protection as possible.

There's a list of things to look for and avoid in the "3 Keys to Keeping Your Teen Alive" workbook. These websites will also be useful:

- ▶ www.safercar.gov - This NHTSA website rates vehicles according to how they performed in front & side crashes and gives rollover ratings.
- ▶ www.iihs.org - This site is sponsored by The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. It rates vehicles as Good, Acceptable, Marginal or Poor in front, side and rear crashes. It also allows you to evaluate comparable vehicles to find the best vehicle in a particular class.
- ▶ <http://www.autosafety.org/video-archive> - The Center for Auto Safety has all kinds of auto information.
- ▶ <http://www.theautochannel.com/media/index.html> - The Auto Channel provides information about various makes and models as well as listing the costs you can expect to pay for maintaining the vehicle.
- ▶ <http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/recalls/recallsearch.cfm> - This NHTSA site will show you any recalls that have been issued on that vehicle.

Working with your teen to help them become safe, responsible drivers can be frustrating and time-consuming. Your teens may get angry when 'no one else's parents' make their kids do what you require of yours. You could be "the meanest parent in the world."

And you'll never know if what you've done has changed what might have happened. But I can assure you that if you invest your time and energy in helping your teen learn to drive and explain that you're doing it because you love them and want them to be safe, it will make a difference. And - no matter what happens - you won't have any regrets.