



Dear Parent,

Learning to drive is one of the most significant steps in your child's progression to adulthood. Having raised two teenagers of my own, I can tell you that it's also one of the most challenging parts of parenting. With auto crashes the leading killer of teens, responsible for two out of every five teen deaths, you're right to be concerned about your child's driving. This AAA *Parent-to-Parent Teen Driving Discussion Guide* can help you, your teens, their friends and their parents develop rules that will help you all get through this exciting process more safely and with a bit less anxiety.

There is reason to worry. Statistics illustrate the dangers inexperienced drivers face:

- The fatal crash rate per mile driven is twice as high among 16-year olds as it is among 18- to 19-year olds.
- Forty-two percent of the deaths of teenagers in motor vehicles during 2003 occurred between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- Adding teenage passengers to the vehicle greatly increases the crash risk for new drivers. With one passenger, the fatal crash risk nearly doubles. With two or more passengers, it increases five-fold.

Though these statistics are alarming, there are steps you can take to keep your teens safe. Recognizing that learning to drive is one of the riskiest periods of your child's life is the first, important step. The second step is establishing a serious dialogue with your teen well before they reach driving age.

Teen drivers are at risk because they are *inexperienced*. Keeping them safe is a matter of giving them time, and the right conditions, to gain the experience they need to be good drivers. That means time driving with you, and time driving by themselves, when they can focus on the complex and dangerous task of driving without distractions.

Responsibility for setting the parameters for your teen's access to a vehicle will rest largely on you, the parent. Restricting your teen's driving privileges can be contentious – especially if you've imposed rules that other parents have not. We've all heard "Nobody else has to follow these rules" and "Come on Dad, this isn't fair." But the stakes are high, and imposing rules about driving other teens, and riding with teen drivers, can be a life-saving decision. If you're the first parent in your teen's group to take this step, it can be difficult. To help you discuss your rules with other parents we've designed the attached conversation guide to help ease the strain for you and your teen driver. These guidelines are only intended to serve as a starting point, and ideally, parents should get together to collectively set teen driving privileges.

We hope this will encourage a dialogue on teen driving in your community and go a long way toward keeping your new driver and everyone on the road safe.

AAA has been committed to teen driver safety for more than half a century. From pioneering driver education in the 1930s, to recent advocacy efforts to improve graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws, AAA clubs across the country remain dedicated to improving the way teens are licensed in this country. In 1997 only eight states had GDL laws, and now every state and the District of Columbia has some form of GDL. We've also developed guidelines for parents to use when selecting a driver education school, which are available at www.aaa.com/publicaffairs.

Let's work together to make our driving environment safe for everyone.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Darbelnet
AAA President and CEO



PARENT EXCHANGE - SUGGESTED

HOW TO START A GROUP CONVERSATION ON TEEN DRIVING

- Bring together the parents of your children's closest friends in a social setting and talk about the limits you've placed on your teen's driving.
- Work through your community association to have a meeting for parents.
- Talk to adult leaders of groups your teen is involved in – sports teams, school band, church youth group, after school clubs, etc. – about setting up a meeting for parents.
- Ask community groups and businesses that employ large numbers of teens to facilitate conversations about teen driving.

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

Parents are Role Models: Research shows a strong relationship between children's behavior in the vehicle and their parents' actions. Teens say that the greatest role models they have are their parents. If you speed, tailgate and run red lights, your teen is likely to as well. Remember: *There's no better role model than you.*

Seat Belts Save Lives: If your teen is allowed to transport other passengers, encourage them to insist that everyone who rides with them wear their seat belts – regardless of age or where they sit in the vehicle. Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. An analysis of federal crash data shows that more than two-thirds of teen occupants killed in crashes are not wearing safety belts.

Cell Phones: Distracted drivers representing all age groups are a factor in 25 to 50 percent of all vehicle crashes. Remind teens that driving requires their full attention. If using a phone is unavoidable, they should use it at a safe time and place. *Again, remember there's no better role model than you.*

REVIEW YOUR STATE'S LAWS

Look at your state's GDL law as a baseline.

- **Nighttime Curfews:** The nighttime (9:00 p.m. – 6:00 a.m.) fatal crash risk for 16-year old drivers is particularly high, about two times the daytime (6:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.) risk. Many states already have a nighttime restriction so check the law and use the information to set a reasonable curfew for your teen. Encourage parent carpools for special occasions, such as dances or other school events. Nighttime crash rates are generally higher, as are alcohol-related crashes, during the early morning hours. If the nighttime restriction in your state starts at midnight or if your state doesn't have a restriction – talk about ways you can carpool to keep teens off the road even earlier at night.
- **Passenger Restrictions:** Teen passengers distract teen drivers, and dramatically increase the risk of a crash. One of the most effective GDL provisions is a strict passenger restriction. If you are comfortable restricting your teen from carrying passengers for the first six months to a year that they are licensed, talk to other parents to see if they will enforce the same limits. If you can't get other parents to agree, at least inform them about the driving restrictions your teen faces and encourage them to tell their children that they can't ride in the car with your teen for a set of period of time and that your teen isn't allowed in their car without adult supervision.

LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER'S KIDS

- **Extend the “Neighborhood Watch” Principle to Teens in the Neighborhood:** Share the rules in your house with your neighbors and close friends. The more people looking out for your teen, the better.
- **Talk With Other Parents:** Use extracurricular activities as a way to talk to other parents. These events provide a perfect opportunity to talk about teen driving, as well as other social issues facing teens. Limiting teen driving means a few more months for parents to drive to school, athletic practices, and after-school activities. Offer to drive other teens when you are driving your own – lead by example and maybe others will reciprocate!

RESOURCES TO HELP

AAA and Teen Driver Safety: www.aaa.com/publicaffairs

Driver ZED: An interactive risk management training program for teen drivers is available through the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety: www.aaafoundation.org/home

You can also contact your local AAA club for more information.

Good Luck!