

# HOW TO CHOOSE INSURANCE

## *Helpful Hints from the Experts*

### Should You Give Your Teenager The Keys To The Car?

by Richard Berman

(NAPSA)—A sound guaranteed to sink the hearts of parents with teenagers: "Can I borrow the car, please?"

The sun is out, the sky is blue, and your precious offspring want



to hang out with their friends, in your car. You're likely to eventually give in, so it's best to prepare yourself, and them, for the responsibilities of driving.

Insurance is expensive because teenage drivers have the highest crash risk of any age group. Per mile traveled, teenagers have the highest involvement rates in all types of crashes, from those involving property damage to those that are fatal. Crashes are the leading cause of death among American teens. Quite simply, insurance is essential, but there are things you can do to reduce the cost.

#### **Putting the Brakes on Expenses**

Everyone would like to save on insurance costs, and that's not a bad thing, however, you do not want to lower the liability limit, says Laurie Wallace of Amica Mutual Insurance ([www.amica.com](http://www.amica.com)). "If a teenage driver causes physical damage or bodily injury," says Wallace, "you need to be fully covered. You want to be sure to add your teenage driver to your policy and, if anything, increase the liability limit."

Whether parents are looking to add their children to a policy or simply renew a policy of their own, the best insurance companies are financially stable and have good ratings. Wallace suggests checking with consumer information companies such as J.D. Power and Associates or seeing who is the highest rated in the best consumer magazines.

Some insurance companies like Amica will offer discounts to lower the cost of insurance. Discounts are available for teenagers who complete approved driver training courses and good students with a B average report card.

Parents can combine discounts as well. Janet Bellows of Amica says, in most states, her company offers a discount for students who are away at school, over 100 miles from home, who don't have a vehicle with them. "It is an excellent idea to keep the teenager on the parents' policy in case they drive another vehicle while they are away at school," she says.

#### **Lead by Example**

Bellows also advocates that teenage drivers be well supervised even after they've received their licenses. Teenage drivers often won't drive in the same manner with parents in the car as they do when their friends are there. Friends may goad teens into driving wildly, or the teens may just want to show off. Parents should limit the number of passengers allowed in the car because sixteen year-olds' fatal crashes are more likely to occur when other teenagers are in the car and the risk increases with every additional passenger. Curfews are a good idea as well. Parents should limit driving at night because this is a high-risk activity for beginners.

Per mile driven, the nighttime fatal crash rate for 16 year-olds is about twice as high as it is during the day.

#### **Seat belts Are Mandatory**

"You can prepare your teenage driver by setting a good example yourself, like always wearing a seat belt and abiding by the law," says Bellows.

"Insist on seat belts all the time as more than half of all teens who die in crashes are completely unrestrained." New drivers learn a lot from role models, so practice safe driving. Teens with crashes and violations often have parents who have poor driving records themselves. Obviously drinking and driving for teenagers and parents is completely taboo.

"Driver's education programs offered in school or in the community are a good way to learn," says Wallace. "At Amica, we think parents should also put in drive time with the teenager. Also, it's quite obvious that teens shouldn't be driving sports cars or performance vehicles."

#### **A License with Strings Attached**

It's a critical time for parents when a teenager can get a license. For a teenager it represents freedom. But the price of freedom is steep. Parents shouldn't just brush over important issues such as drinking and driving, seat belts, speeding and peer pressure by thinking their child would never do such a thing, because, sadly, the evidence often points to the contrary.

*Richard Berman is a writer specializing in insurance issues. He consulted with Amica Insurance (1-800-24-Amica) regarding information and content for this column.*