

Auto Safety Report

Teenage Driving: What Parents Should Know

(NAPSA)—Many people believe that the inexperience and immaturity of teenage drivers is a dangerous mix. In fact, teenage drivers have more motor vehicle crashes than any other age group. Nationwide, more than 4,600 people age 16 to 18 were killed or seriously injured in fatal traffic crashes in 2000.

“Despite these negative statistics, parents can work with their teens to help reduce their risks behind the wheel,” said Stephen Epstein, M.D., of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). “In fact, studies show that when parents talk to their teens about their expectations and behind-the-wheel behavior, those teens are less likely to drink, drive under the influence, or speed, and they are more likely to wear their seat belts.”

ACEP offers parents the following tips to help increase teen safety behind the wheel.

- Consider graduated licensing programs. Some states have laws that give teens progressively more driving privileges. Parents can do the same. By slowly increasing driving privileges, they can help teens get the experience needed to drive safely and responsibly.
- Supervise driving practices. Plan many practice sessions with your teenager in various situations, including at night.
- Restrict night driving. Many fatal crashes (41 percent) occur after 9 p.m. Their inexperience driving in the dark could cause teens to get into situations they are not capable of handling—and panic.



Parents can help teens get the experience they need to handle themselves behind the wheel.

- Restrict passengers. Too many passengers in a vehicle distract the driver.
 - Remind teens drinking and driving kills. Make it absolutely clear that it is illegal and dangerous to drive after drinking or using any drug. Teens should also read over-the-counter and prescription medication labels to determine if they can affect a driver's abilities.
 - Be a role model. Practice safe driving yourself. Teens with crashes and violations often have parents with poor driving records.
 - Require safety belt use.
- “Emergency physicians see all too often the tragic consequences of teenagers not buckling up while in a car or taking risks behind the wheel,” said Dr. Epstein. “Impress upon your teen the responsibility they have not only to protect themselves, but also their passengers, other drivers and pedestrians.”
- For more information on health and safety issues, visit www.ACEP.org.