



## 8 DANGER ZONES FOR TEENS BEHIND THE WHEEL

Getting a driver's license is an exciting time for a teen. But driving is especially dangerous for young, new drivers. In fact, 11 teens die each day as the result of a car crash. As a parent, you can help keep your teen safe on the road. Make sure your teen is aware of the leading causes of teen crashes and how to avoid them.

- **No. 1: Driver inexperience:** Crash rates are highest during the first year a teen has a license. Provide as much supervised driving practice as possible—at least 30 to 50 hours over a period of no less than six months. This will help your teen gain the skill he or she needs. Even when your teen has a full license, it is a good idea to limit his or her driving during risky conditions. These include driving at night, in bad weather, on highways, and with teen passengers. Allow more driving privileges as your teen gains experience and skill.
- **No. 2: Driving with teen passengers:** Crash risk goes up when teens drive with other teens in the car. Nearly 2 out of 3 teen crash deaths that involve 16-year-old drivers happen when a new driver has one or more teen passengers. Follow your state's GDL laws for passenger restrictions. If your state does not have a teen passenger rule, limit the number of teens your child may drive to zero or one. Keep this rule for at least the first 6 months of his or her license.
- **No. 3: Nighttime driving:** Nighttime fatal crash rates for 16-year-olds are nearly twice as high as daytime rates. Nighttime driving is risky because it is harder to see at night and people are often tired. Be sure your teen is off the road by 9 or 10 PM. Stick by this rule for at least the first 6 months of your teen having his or her license.

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- **No. 4: Not using seat belts:** In 2007, 6 out of 10 teen drivers and 2 out of 3 teen passengers who died in car crashes were not wearing seat belts. The simplest way to prevent motor vehicle crash deaths is to buckle up. Wearing a seat belt will cut your teen’s risk of dying or being badly injured in a crash by about half. Remind your teen to wear a seat belt on every trip—even just for a drive around the corner.
- **No. 5: Distracted driving:** Nearly 8 out of 10 crashes happen within 3 seconds of a driver becoming distracted. Common distractions for teen drivers are talking on cell phones, using in-car electronic devices, text messaging, eating, playing with CDs or the radio, and yelling out the window. Forbid all activities that could affect your teen’s driving attention.
- **No. 6: Drowsy driving:** Young drivers are at highest risk for drowsy driving, which causes thousands of crashes every year. Other than late at night, teens are most tired and at risk when driving between 6 and 8 in the morning. Be sure your teen is fully rested before he or she gets behind the wheel.
- **No. 7: Reckless driving:** Research shows that teens lack the judgment and maturity to assess risky situations. Help your teen to avoid the following unsafe behaviors.
  - **Speeding:** Make sure your teen knows to follow the speed limit and adjust speed to road conditions.
  - **Tailgating:** Remind your teen to maintain enough space behind the vehicle ahead to avoid a crash if a sudden stop is needed.
  - **Insufficient scanning:** Stress the importance of always knowing the location of other vehicles on the road. Scan ahead before making left turns; to the side when yielding the right of way at intersections; and behind when changing lanes.
- **No. 8: Impaired driving:** Of all drivers between 15 and 20 years of age involved in fatal crashes in 2007, nearly 1 out of 3 had been drinking. In the United States, it is illegal for anyone under age 21 to drink alcohol. All states have zero tolerance laws that ban underage drinking and driving. Most states will suspend or cancel the license of a teen who violates these laws. Strictly enforce zero tolerance laws at home, whether or not your teen driver is caught by law enforcement.

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Parents: You Have the Power



**HANDING  
YOUR  
TEEN  
THE CAR  
KEYS—**

**ARE YOU  
CONFIDENT  
OR CONCERNED?**



## PARENTS ARE THE KEY TO SAFE TEEN DRIVING

Car crashes—the #1 killer of teens—take over 4,000 young lives every year. That’s 11 teen deaths each day that can be prevented. As a parent, it is important to know that the main cause of teen crashes is driver inexperience. All new drivers—even straight-A students and ‘good kids’—are more likely than experienced drivers to be involved in a fatal crash. It’s a fact.

The good news is that you can make a difference by getting involved with your teen’s driving. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created tools to help you learn the most dangerous driving situations for your young driver and how to avoid them. You might be surprised by what you find out.

### Parents Have the Power

Believe it or not, when asked whose opinion they listen to and care about most of all, most teens will name their parents. That is why leading experts believe parents play a key role in preventing teen car crashes and deaths.

Talk with your teen about the dangers of driving. Express your concern for his or her safety and well-being. Keep the conversation going over time. And take these steps, which have been proven to reduce serious injury and death:

- **Extend your teen’s supervised driving period:** Help your teen develop the skills he or she needs by providing as many supervised practice driving hours as possible. Include at least 30 to 50 hours of practice over at least six months. Make sure to practice on a variety of road conditions and at different times of day. The more practice your teen gets now, the better his or her skills will be when driving alone.

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Your years behind the wheel have given you experience you can share with your teen. You may even find that supervised driving is a good way to spend quality time together. Use the time to gain each other's respect behind the wheel.

- **Set the rules of the road:** Practice driving will empower your teen. But your rules will provide much needed limits to keep him or her safe. Your rules should address the leading hazards for teen drivers, such as driving while distracted (see “Eight Danger Zones” at [www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey](http://www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey) for a full list). Support the rules that most states have for new teen drivers by including the following:
  - **Make sure your teen always wears a seat belt.** The easiest way to prevent motor vehicle deaths is to buckle up. Wearing a safety belt on every trip will cut your teen's chances of being killed or seriously injured in a crash by about half.
  - **Limit your teen's nighttime driving.** Fatal crashes for 16-year-olds happen almost twice as often at night than during the day. Be sure your teen is off the road after dark. This is most important during the first 6 months that he or she has a license.
  - **Restrict the number of teen passengers allowed in the car.** The chances of a teen driver crashing increase when teen passengers are in the car. Nearly 2 out of 3 teen crash deaths involving 16-year-old drivers happen when a new driver has one or more teen passengers. Limit the number of other teens your child may drive to zero or one. Keep this rule for at least the first 6 months of his or her license, depending on your state's law.
- **Enforce the rules with a parent-teen contract:** Discuss your rules of the road with your teen. Talk about why they are important to follow, as well as consequences for breaking the rules. Work with your teen to draft and sign a parent-teen driving contract (a sample is provided at [www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey](http://www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey)). You may choose to hang your parent-teen driver contract on the refrigerator door to highlight the importance of safe driving. Let your teen know that following the rules and driving safely will result in greater driving privileges.

After taking these steps, continue to talk often with your teen about his or her driving habits. Believe it or not, your teen is listening to you.

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## PARENT-TEEN DRIVING CONTRACT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, will drive carefully and cautiously and will be courteous to other drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians at all times.

### I promise that I will obey all the rules of the road.

- Always wear a seat belt and make all my passengers buckle up
- Obey all traffic lights, stop signs, other street signs, and road markings
- Stay within the speed limit and drive safely
- Never use the car to race or to try to impress others
- Never give rides to hitchhikers

### I promise that I will make sure I can stay focused on driving.

- Drive with both hands on the wheel
- Never eat, drink, or use a cell phone to talk or text messages while I drive
- Drive only when I am alert and in emotional control
- Call my parents for a ride home if I am impaired in any way that interferes with my ability to drive safely
- Never use earphones to listen to mp3 player or other electronic devices while I drive

### I promise that I will respect laws about drugs and alcohol.

- Drive only when I am alcohol and drug free
- Never allow any alcohol or illegal drugs in the car
- Be a passenger only with drivers who are alcohol and drug free

### I promise that I will be a responsible driver.

- Drive only when I have permission to use the car and I will not let anyone else drive the car unless I have permission
- Drive someone else's car only if I have parental permission
- Pay for all traffic citations or parking tickets
- Complete my family responsibilities and maintain good grades at school as listed here: \_\_\_\_\_
- Contribute to the costs of gasoline, maintenance, and insurance as listed here: \_\_\_\_\_

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Additional Promises:

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**I agree to the following restrictions, but understand that these restrictions will be modified by my parents as I get more driving experience and demonstrate that I am a responsible driver.**

- For the next \_\_\_\_\_ months, I will not drive after \_\_\_\_\_ pm.
- For the next \_\_\_\_\_ months, I will not transport more than \_\_\_\_\_ teen passengers (unless I am supervised by a responsible adult).
- For the next \_\_\_\_\_ months, I won't adjust the stereo, electronic devices, or air conditioning/heater while the car is moving.
- For the next \_\_\_\_\_ months, I will not drive in bad weather.
- I understand that I am not permitted to drive to off-limit locations or on roads and highways as listed here:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Additional restrictions:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I agree to follow all the rules and restrictions in this contract. I understand that my parents will impose penalties (see below), including removal of my driving privileges, if I violate the contract. I also understand that my parents will allow me greater driving privileges as I become more experienced and as I demonstrate that I am always a safe and responsible driver.**

#### **Penalties for contract violations**

- Drove after drinking alcohol or using drugs  
No driving for \_\_\_\_\_ months
- Got ticket for speeding or moving violation  
No driving for \_\_\_\_\_ months
- Drove after night driving curfew  
No driving for \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/months
- Drove too many passengers  
No driving for \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/months
- Broke promise about seat belts (self and others)  
No driving for \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/months
- Drove on a road or to an area that is off-limits  
No driving for \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/months

#### **Signatures**

- Driver: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Parent promise: I also agree to drive safely and to be an excellent role model.
- Parent (or guardian): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Parent (or guardian): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics "Parent-Teen Driving Agreement"*  
([www.aap.org/publiced/BR\\_TeenDriver.htm](http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_TeenDriver.htm))

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