

www.SafeTeenDriving.org

Parent Guide for Teaching Your Teenager to Drive

This guide is designed to help you and your teen through the critical first stages of driving and will provide a foundation for a lifetime of safe and responsible driving. Good luck and enjoy the experience of helping your teen become a safe driver. Below are resources if you would like further information about teen driving.

Resources

Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles
www.dmv.state.va.us/

Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles
Applying for a Learner's Permit
www.dmv.virginia.gov/webdoc/citizen/drivers/applying_learners.asp

45-Hour Parent/Teen Driving Guide
www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/PE/40hour.pdf

Parent-Teen Driving Contract from Allstate Insurance Company
www.allstate.com/about/teen_driving_contract_letter_size.pdf

Top Ten Tips for Preventing Teen Accidents from GEICO Insurance Company
www.geico.com/pdf/autosafety/TopTenTips.pdf

For more links to web sites
www.safeteendriving.org/involved/forparents.php



For additional information, call 800-609-2680

Partners:
Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles
Virginia Department of Education

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With Freedom Comes Responsibility



**/Focus Forward
/Buckle-up
/Slow Down**



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How do you teach a 16-year-old to be safe and courteous behind the wheel of an automobile? Unfortunately, there is no magic formula to prepare your teenager for the responsibilities of driving. Driver education at its best is a team effort involving schools, communities, students, and families.

Cars do not crash; people crash them. The driver, especially the young driver, continues to be a weak link in automotive safety. Each year, more than 100 high school students are killed and more than 15,000 students are injured on Virginia's roadways. Injuries to students in car crashes account for more years of productive life lost than all other causes. Hospitalization and rehabilitation costs, lost time from school, and other costs associated with long-term injuries create substantial emotional, physical, and financial problems for students, their families, and schools.

Parents and families – not the school – are in the best position to encourage responsible behavior and have a sustained effect on minimizing risks faced by inexperienced drivers. Parental reinforcement of basic driving skills and good decision making will lead to safe driving habits that will last a lifetime.



Virginia teens need our help and guidance to practice the skills necessary to drive safely and responsibly.

Parents: Be a Role Model for the Road!

Visit Partners for Safe Teen Driving at www.safeteendriving.org for information, news articles, and facts that teens and parents will find valuable.

Your biggest contribution to your teen driver's safety and skill behind the wheel will be your example. Patience, courtesy, and a willingness to improve will be your best assets. Now is the time to review your own driving habits and offer your teen the example of courtesy and consideration for other road users. This may do more than anything else to ensure your teen's driving safety.

PARTNERS FOR SAFE TEEN DRIVING

A COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles and Prince William County Public Schools are partnering for teen driver safety. Partners for Safe Teen Driving is an educationally focused community health initiative that is designed to educate parents about what they can do to better prepare their teens for driving.



Driving an automobile is the most dangerous behavior any Virginian does, and the first 1,000 hours for the beginning driver are the most perilous. Parents can help their teen become a better driver by understanding the following significant factors for safe teen driving:

- Knowledge of behind-the-wheel instruction;
- Knowledge of Virginia licensing procedures for beginning drivers;
- Knowledge of Virginia traffic laws and teenage drivers; and
- Knowledge of parent coaching methods and strategies.

Coaching Your Teenager's Driving

As the parent of a teenager learning to drive, you are likely to be concerned about the welfare and safety of your child. Following are two major steps to take in teaching your child to drive. First, review your own driving habits and offer your teen an example of safe driving practices and courtesy for others who use our roadways. This may do more than anything else to ensure your teenager's driving safety. Second, make your teenager's practice driving sessions safe, positive, and productive by following the tips below.

Set a good example:

- Always wear your safety belt.
- Correct any unsafe driving habits that you may have acquired.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of Virginia traffic laws.
- Refrain from using electronic devices and multi-tasking while driving.
- Drive within the speed limits.

Your biggest contribution to your teen's safety and effectiveness behind the wheel will be your example. Patience, courtesy, and a willingness to share will be your best assets.





Tips on Coaching Your Teen's Driving

- Follow the Virginia Department of Education's required 45-Hour Teen/Parent Driving Guide.
- Enjoy your time together. Have fun! This is a great "bonding" opportunity. Focus on the driving task and leave family issues at home.
- Clear your own schedule and mark your calendar for practice times and remain consistent.
- Designate and pre-determine a place to practice.
- Let your teenager know you care about his or her safety while practicing.
- Stay calm, rational, upbeat, and engaged.
- Insist that your teen make safety and instrument adjustments before driving:
 - Adjust the rearview mirrors.
 - Reposition the seat before driving.
 - Adjust and fasten safety belts.
 - Set temperature adjustments.
 - Turn off the radio or CD player.
 - Turn off all electronic devices.



Road Commentary Driving

This technique is used with more advanced drivers. The driver is asked to do a running commentary on what hazards or factors he or she is taking into account while driving. ("Car turning left ahead," "approaching crosswalk," "car overtaking in the left lane," etc.)



Attitude determines how knowledge and skills will be used. It determines whether a driver will be cooperative or competitive in traffic, will choose a safe or high level of risk, and/or will put into practice the concepts taught on defensive driving courses.





12-Second Rule

Ideally, the defensive driver is anticipating traffic movements and potential hazards as far away as the point the car will reach in 12 seconds. Within this distance the driver should scan the scene, including sidewalks, and make adjustments to speed and position as necessary.



Smith System

The Smith System is one of the most widely used methods for improving defensive driving. It provides five rules for training the eyes to see what is important in driving. They are:

- Aim high (to steer accurately and anticipate problems).
- Keep your eyes moving (avoid a fixed stare, stay alert).
- Get the big picture (don't allow your eyes to be drawn to one area).
- Leave yourself an "out" (practice the "what if . . ." game).
- Make sure they see you (when necessary make eye contact with other drivers and use warning devices at the proper time).

These rules sound simple but it takes considerable practice to develop the habit of using them at all times in traffic. Good management of space and time allows the Smith System driver to use the five rules most effectively, always having time to scan the scene around the car and adjust speed and position to minimize hazards.

- Your coaching comments should make your teen more aware, rather than feeling ashamed or judged.
- Don't use instructional time in the car to discipline your teenager about other matters.
- Check to make sure your child has a learner's permit, vehicle registration card, and insurance information with him or her when operating a vehicle.
- If possible, begin instruction in a car with an automatic transmission so that your child can focus on mastering basic vehicle control maneuvers.

Coach Your Teenager to Assess and Manage Driving Risks

- Look far down the road. Look as far down the road as possible to uncover important traffic information to make the best decision.
- See the big picture. Maintain proper following distance and don't tailgate.
- Keep your eyes scanning. Don't stare. Constantly check side and rearview mirrors. Stay alert.
- Leave yourself a way out. Be prepared. Surround your vehicle with space in front and at least on one side to escape collisions.
- Make sure other drivers see you. Use your signals and the horn if necessary.





Adolescent Development and Driving

Driving is far from a simple task for anyone. It is a mix of decision making and motor responses controlled by specific brain areas. Recent research on the brain has revealed that neural circuitry is not fully developed in decision-making areas until the mid-20s. This may be one reason why teenagers and those up to age 25 are at high risk for accidents when they are behind the wheel.

What do we know about the “neural circuitry” of adolescents?

In the last two decades, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has provided insights never before available into brain functioning. Scientists now know that the decision-making portion of a teenager’s brain is not mature and that the impulse control portion of brain does not physically mature until about age 25.

Teenagers, when compared to adults, do not have the same impulse control and ability to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous behaviors. The prefrontal cortex, the area immediately behind the forehead, is responsible for judgment and decision making and is the last part of the brain to fully develop. As a result, teenagers often fail to realize that fast driving, drinking and driving, drag racing, and filling a car with passengers are dangerous activities.



2-Second Rule (3 seconds for beginners)

This provides safe spacing when following another car at any speed. By noting when a car ahead of you passes a fixed point and counting your time to reach that same point, you can determine whether your space is safe. Two seconds (count “one thousand and one, one thousand and two”) is the minimum safe space. This should be practiced by beginning drivers from the passenger seat! The beginner will then develop a sense of what a safe space looks like at different speeds. With beginning drivers, three seconds should be the minimum distance to follow other vehicles.



4-Second Rule

This is an approximate time needed to stop at speeds over 35 miles an hour. To calculate, choose a fixed point on the roadway ahead and count the seconds until you get there. If you reach that point under four seconds, you would probably not be able to stop safely. If you reach that point after four seconds, you would be able to stop in time to avoid a collision.





Effective Practices



Manage Risk by Developing Careful Driving Habits

Being a good driver means more than just being cautious, and mere experience isn't enough either. A good driver has to work at developing sound driving habits. The following is a review of effective practices taught in driver education classes that promote the development of safe and responsible driving behaviors.



Managing Space and Time

A driver must have space to maneuver and time to react. The following time rules help beginning drivers compensate for their inexperience and are proven techniques at reducing risk in traffic.



Teenagers need active parental supervision, especially where driving is concerned.

With this research in mind, discuss with your teenager:

- What risky driving behaviors are and how to recognize and avoid them;
- "Doing the right things" and managing risk while driving;
- How to handle peer pressure;
- The reality that driving is serious business, even though advertising messages show everyone having fun; and
- That over time driving experience pays off, but right now your teenager is inexperienced and a high risk driver.

Based on what is known about adolescent development, here are seven tips for parents of teen drivers:

- Be a role model for safe driving.
- Have patience and offer praise for doing the right thing and obeying the law.
- Talk frequently about safe driving habits.
- Set clear limits and expectations for your teen's driving.
- Practice, practice, practice!





Survive the Top Five

The top five reasons teenagers have automobile crashes or are seriously injured are:

- Driver inexperience;
- Driver distractions;
- Excessive speed;
- Low usage of seat belts, and
- Use of alcohol and illegal drugs.



What Can You Do to Help Your Teen Survive?

Get Driving Experience:

- Practice with your teens . . . practice, practice, practice.
- Have your teen learn to drive in different situations: on the highway, at night, and in different weather conditions. Remind your teen to listen to weather forecasts.

Eyes on the Road:

- Be a good role model by showing your teen that you give the road your full attention.
- Demonstrate daily that you don't let distractions get in the way of your safe driving.

Drive the Speed Limit:

- Set a good example by driving the posted speed limit.
- Explain to your teenager the consequences of driving too fast for road conditions.

Wear Seat Belts:

- Demonstrate the habit of buckling up every time you get in a car.
- Make sure your teen hears you remind all passengers to buckle up before you begin to drive.

Never Drink and Drive:

- Never drive when you have been drinking, and do not use illegal drugs!
- Never drive if you have taken any prescription or over-the-counter medicines than can cause drowsiness.

