

Driving after Sunset*

According to the National Safety Council (NSC), death rates are three times greater driving at night when compared to the daytime. Driving after sunset presents a new set of challenges to teenage drivers. The obvious challenges are glare and reduced visibility. The first routes your child drives after sunset should be on low volume roadways that the new driver has had some driving experience on during daylight.

Vision is severely limited at night. The vehicle's narrow headlight beams limit the driver's view of the area ahead, and the off-road area may not be visible at all. In addition, the new driver will find it difficult to determine the size, speed, color, and distance of objects. Parents should coach their new driver to try to look at the outer fringes of his or her headlight beams to get the best picture of possible dangers ahead and to the sides of the vehicle. Emphasize the need to reduce speed and to increase following distance. In addition, dirt on the headlight lenses can reduce their effectiveness by as much as 75%.

Avoid using a light inside the car because this will also greatly reduce your night vision.

Overdriving your headlights occurs when the vehicle's stopping distance is greater than the area illuminated by the headlights. To determine whether you are overdriving your headlights, have your child select an object the moment the headlights pick it up, and count off 6 seconds. If the object is still ahead of the vehicle, you are driving at a safe speed. If you have passed it, you are driving too fast. Remind your child that posted speed limits are calculated for daylight driving and are often too fast for nighttime conditions.

Blinded by the headlights of oncoming cars. Coach your child to look to the right-hand side of the lane and to make brief, frequent glances at the target ahead keeping the oncoming cars in the corner of the driver's vision.

Glare recovery is the time it takes your eyes to adjust after being blinded by bright lights. Oncoming traffic is the primary source of glare when driving at night. Glare is also caused by the headlights of cars behind you and a dirty windshield. Adjust your rearview mirror to the "night" setting and side view mirrors to reduce glare. Dirt on glass will reflect rays of light, either from the sun or headlights, and add to glare.

*This information is taken from the 45-Hour Parent/Teen Driving Guide developed by the Virginia Department of Education. For more information, go to http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Instruction/PE/parent_teen_driving_guide.pdf.

A FEW MORE TIPS . . .

Safe Driving at Night

If you have car trouble, pull off the road as far as possible. Warn approaching traffic at once by setting up reflecting triangles near your vehicle and 300 feet behind it. Turn on flashers and the dome light. Stay off the roadway and get passengers away from the area.

Common Sense Night Driving

If there is any doubt, turn your headlights on. Lights will not help you see better in early twilight, but they'll make it easier for other drivers to see you. Being seen is as important as seeing.