

HIGH SCHOOL PARENT



Teens and driving

Though it may seem only yesterday that your son or daughter was taking a first wobbly bike ride, your soon-to-be 16-year-old is now itching to get behind the wheel of the family car. While you can't stop your teens from growing up, you can make sure that once they are driving or riding with friends, they know the risks and responsibilities of the open road.

For many teens, driving represents freedom. No longer are they beholden to mom or dad to get to the mall or visit a friend. Driving and owning a car can also give them status among their peers. And for parents who are scheduled to the hilt, having a teen driver can be a real timesaver.

Yet teens are at greater risk for accidents and fatalities than any other group of drivers due to inexperience and such behaviors as speeding, aggressive driving and tailgating. Becoming a teen driver also carries hefty legal and financial responsibilities.



Consider this:

- ▼ At age 16, a teen is legally culpable, meaning if stopped for DUI or DWI or involved in a crash that injures or kills someone, he or she will be tried in adult court and could be sent to prison.
- ▼ The average fine for speeding just 10 miles over the limit is \$60 to \$200. That's a lot of hours spent slinging burgers to pay the fine.
- ▼ Teens who work to buy and maintain a car have less time to focus on school work or extracurricular activities.

- ▼ Adding a 16-year-old driver to your auto insurance policy can increase your annual premium by as much as 50 to 100 percent.

Helping your teens hit the road safely

Helping your teen grow into a safe and responsible driver takes understanding, involvement and firm limits. Here are some suggestions:

- ▼ **Take an active role in helping your teenager learn to drive.** Supplement driver education with practice sessions in a wide variety of situations, such as driving at night, in heavy traffic or on the highway. Supervised practice should be spread over at least six months and continue even after a teen graduates from a learner's permit to a restricted or full license. One family agonized when their teen received her learner permit in the dead of winter. Eventually they came to believe that all the supervised practice of driving on ice and parallel parking next to snow banks put her in better stead over the long run.
- ▼ **Remember, you are a role model.** New drivers learn a lot by example, so practice safe driving.
- ▼ **Emphasize the importance of safety belts.** Though you can't buckle your teenagers in or be sure they'll keep them on once they leave the driveway, you can require seat belt use when you are riding together in the car. Make sure you wear yours, too. Hopefully it will become a habit that sticks. *It's the law.*
- ▼ **Prohibit driving and drinking.** While alcohol isn't a factor in most crashes of 16-year-old drivers, even small amounts of alcohol can impair teens.

Many families adopt an "anytime, anyplace" policy, which means that regardless of time or distance, a teen who feels he or she shouldn't drive can call home for a ride.

- ▼ **Limit night driving.** The problem isn't just that night driving requires more skill. Outings at night tend to be recreational. In these circumstances, even teens who usually follow the rules can be easily distracted or encouraged to take risks.
- ▼ **Restrict passengers.** Teen passengers in a vehicle can distract a beginning driver and may lead to greater risk-taking. Almost two of every three teen passenger deaths occur in crashes when another teen is driving. The best policy is to restrict teen passengers to no more than one.
- ▼ **Help your teen choose and maintain a safe vehicle.** Small cars do not offer the best crash protection, sporty cars may encourage speeding, and trucks and small SUVs are more prone to roll over. When it comes to cars, teens often focus on appearance – the kickin' sound system, chrome hubs and tinted windows – but neglect to make sure their windshield wipers work or their brakes are safe.
- ▼ **Start 'em out young.** Even before your child is eligible for a learner's permit, you can teach about safe driving every time you ride together. Talk about what traffic signs mean, describe why you are slowing down for a bridge (i.e. bridge surfaces freeze before road surfaces), or explain why you are stopping for a school bus or emergency vehicle. They're a captive audience when you're the driver – take the opportunity to teach.

WEB LINKS:

Graduated licensing law – New York State has a new graduated licensing law that begins September 1, 2003 and creates new restrictions for drivers under age 18: <http://www.nysdmv.com/press/pr102102-gov.htm>

New drivers – How to apply for a license under current laws: <http://www.nysdmv.com/license.htm#newdrivers>

Learner permits and junior licenses – Restrictions and other information: <http://www.nysdmv.com/junlice.htm>

READING:

Sixteen is Too Young To Drive: Taking Control When Your Teen's Behind-the-Wheel by Donna R. and Richard M. Crossman

DRIVER EDUCATION:

The New York State Police offers comprehensive defensive driving courses for new drivers. For more information, contact the traffic section of your local state police headquarters.



High school to present safety program on teenager driving

Colonie Central High School will offer a one-night educational program for parents and students focusing on the do's and don'ts of teenage driving. Sponsored by the CCHS PTSA, the program is about safe driving with a focus on preventing alcohol and drug use behind the wheel.

The workshop will also address driving within speed limits, seatbelt use, avoiding horseplay in automobiles and new permit and license regulations. It will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, March 18, at CCHS. It will be presented by School Resource Officer Brian Casey and Officer Gregory Jensen, both of the Colonie Police Community Services Unit.

Driver Education at CCHS

Colonie Central High School offers a Driver's Education program during the summer months. There is a fee for this program. For more information contact the high school at 459-1220.

▶ THE CONTRACT THAT COULD SAVE YOUR TEEN'S LIFE

To keep your teen safe, draw up a teen-parent driver contract. These contracts allow both parents and teens to mutually sign off on certain safety rules, including seatbelt use and no drinking and driving (go to www.teendrivers.com for examples). These contracts encourage teens to think twice before driving dangerously. Teens also tend to respect a written agreement because you, as parents, have signed it as well.

If either party – you or your teen – break the rules, certain driving privileges are suspended.

Some sobering facts about teenage driving from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

▼ DID YOU KNOW?

- Although teens make up only 7 percent of the total driving population they account for 14 percent of all fatalities.
- Car accidents are the leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 19.
- In the year 2000, alone, 4,877 teen deaths were recorded as a result of preventable causes.
- Today, 16-year-old girls are just as likely to crash as 16-year-old boys.
- Parents are letting girls drive more often, resulting in a 4 percent increase in the driving fatality rate for girls ages 15-20 from 1999 to 2000.
- Of those involved in crashes in 2000, 36 percent of teens had been drinking and 58 percent were speeding at the time.



March 4

Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m., District Office

March 18

CCHS PTA meeting, 6:30 p.m.

Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m., District Office

March 27-29

Line & Cue production: "Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" – evening performances at 7 p.m. plus Saturday matinee at 2 p.m.

April 1

Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m., District Office

April 5

SAT exams
Celebrate Our Diversity Day – CCHS Mug

April 8-10

CCHS Spring concerts

April 12

ACT exams

April 15

Board of Education meeting, 7 p.m., District Office

April 18

Good Friday – No School

April 21-25

Spring Recess – No School