

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 98, Issue 60

July 2009

Teen Charged with Reckless Homicide and Aggravated DUI

A 19-year-old man is charged with two counts of reckless homicide and aggravated driving under the influence after causing a crash that killed two other teens. The man was driving in the wrong lane when the crash occurred.

Source: *Hannibal.net* ♦

Lessons Learned

If you find yourself in the uncomfortable position of trying to take the keys from a drunk driver, these tips will help.

Prevention is the first step. As you probably already know, the first area of the brain to be affected by alcohol is the area that controls judgment. Once a person starts to drink, reason and judgment go out the window, so trying to reason with a potential drunk driver is incredibly difficult.

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Published by the National Safety Commission
for Teens and their Parents



Alcohol also gives a person a false sense of ability, giving them the mistaken belief that they are capable of driving safely.

If you find yourself in a position of trying to prevent someone from driving after they have been drinking, the *National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration* offers the following tips:

- If it is a close friend, try and use a soft, calm approach at first. Suggest to them that they've had too much to drink and it would be better if someone else drove or if they took a cab.
- Be calm. Joke about it. Make light of it. Try to make it sound like you are doing them a favor.
- If it is somebody you don't know well, speak to their friends and have them make an attempt to persuade them to hand over the keys. Usually they will listen.
- Tell them that if they insist on driving, you are not going with them. Suggest that you will call someone else for a ride, take a cab, or walk.
- Locate their keys while they are preoccupied and take them away. Most likely, they will think they've lost them and will be forced to find another mode of transportation.
- If possible, avoid embarrassing the person or being confrontational. This makes them appear vulnerable to alcohol and its effects.

If the situation becomes heated and feelings are hurt, remember that, once reasoning returns after the person sobers up, it will probably all be quickly forgotten.

Remember also that a temporary loss of friendship is preferable to the permanent loss of a friend through a drunk-driving crash.

Teen Dies When Friend Loses Control of Car

A 16-year-old boy died in a crash when the car in which he was a passenger veered off the pavement and hit a light pole. The vehicle skidded off the road when the 18-year-old driver lost control.

Source: *MiamiHerald.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Though teens receive [driver training](#) prior to being licensed and are subject to [Graduated Driver Licensing](#) laws to protect them from statistically high-risk driving situations, training shouldn't end when teens get their licenses. Reasons for this include:

1. *Newly licensed teenage drivers are often giddy with newly acquired freedom.* They will assimilate more information once they have become accustomed to the increased level of independence they've earned.
2. *Teens may pick up bad driving habits, such as carelessness and recklessness, from [riding with other teens](#).*
3. Teens who received defensive driving lessons prior to gaining driving experience often have difficulty applying those lessons until they are licensed.
4. New drivers often suffer from information overload; spreading driver training lessons out over time means they will retain more in the long run.
5. Though drivers are statistically less likely to be injured or killed in motor vehicle crashes as they leave their teens, the overall risk remains high throughout the teenage years when compared to other age groups.

Taking a defensive driving course six to twelve months after licensure is very helpful for new drivers. Teens can take the course [online or in a classroom](#). Typical topics include:

- Crash statistics and the physics of vehicle crashes
- Crash prevention techniques
- Occupant protection devices (such as seat belts and airbags)
- Driving under the influence of alcohol\How to share the road with large trucks, motorcyclists, and pedestrians
- Dealing with stress and drowsiness while driving
- The [hazards of speeding](#)

- An overview of traffic laws in your state

When teens take a defensive driving class, they have the opportunity to apply concepts that may have seemed abstract prior to licensure.

For example, crash prevention techniques are easier to appreciate once the driver has experience in maneuvering a vehicle; unlicensed teens are unlikely to understand how much stress and sleepiness negatively impact their driving abilities.

However, as newly licensed drivers, teens haven't been driving long enough to have ingrained driving habits, so they still have an opportunity to eliminate unsafe practices and become safe drivers.

Avoiding traffic tickets is especially important to drivers who are subject to a Graduated Driver Licensing program; these programs often restrict advancement to the next stage of licensure unless very few or no points accrue on the teen's license.

Traffic violations also mean hefty insurance increases for young drivers, who are already paying high rates because they are in a high-risk category.

But following the rules of the road only when you're worried about [getting a ticket](#) is not sufficient; if you're not concentrating on driving defensively, you're likely to make mistakes due to your reduced level of alertness. These mistakes could result in a ticket or even a crash, and even a minor fender-bender can result in points on your driving record.

Driving defensively is part of an overall pattern of responsible behavior that will help you keep your license and the increased level of independence that comes with it.



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Teen Killed in Crash after Crossing Center Line

A 17-year-old boy was killed when the car he was driving crossed the center line and was hit by a vehicle traveling in the opposite direction. The car spun around when the teen tried to correct after crossing the center line in a curve.

Source: DelawareOnline.com ♦

Lessons Learned

For most parents who are [teaching their teens to drive](#), using commentary driving seems to make perfect sense. But like many other simple tasks, commentary driving is not always easy to do well, and if done improperly, can be frustrating for both the parent and teen.

Since commentary driving involves speaking out loud while driving, parents should model it for teens well before they allow the teen behind the wheel of the vehicle. Teens are likely to feel self-conscious about the process (and parents may, too), so several lessons just on the method itself will be helpful.

Parents should emphasize the fundamentals; for example, taking note of the speed limit every time they enter a new street and watching for pedestrians in every crosswalk.

Just as they would with any other driving lesson, parents should begin practicing commentary driving in a relatively simple driving environment and progress to more complex situations, such as [driving on the expressway](#). Each lesson in a new driving environment should be preceded by a demonstration by the parent of commentary driving in that environment; this allows teens to absorb some of the new hazards they will encounter from the safety of the passenger seat.

One purpose of commentary driving is to focus the driver's attention on her or his thoughts, which in turn helps to maintain a high level of alertness. This is particularly helpful with teens, who may be struggling to overcome the excitement of finally getting to drive enough to focus on the process.

It's also helpful to parents, who otherwise might experience great anxiety as they wonder whether or not their teen has noticed hazards ahead, such as other drivers drifting out of their lanes or following too closely or cars parked on the side of the street.

While commentary driving involves talking while driving, the content of the discussion should be specific and targeted to the driving environment. The driver maintains a running list of observations and actions.

An example of commentary driving is: "Approaching intersection....green light....car in oncoming lane waiting to turn left....checking mirrors....light still green....checking intersection....crossing intersection....".

Comments that are general, i.e., "checking ahead," are not helpful because they don't increase the awareness level of the driver. The person commenting should say what they see and how they plan to handle what they see.

Parents should resist the temptation to interject into teens' comments unless absolutely necessary. Questions such as, "What would it mean if that traffic light was yellow?" and "How many seconds should your following distance be if it starts raining right now?" distract teens from what's in front of them and teach them to rely on someone else's observations instead of making their own. Parents should make note of any discussion points on a [log](#) and cover them at the end of the lesson when the vehicle is parked.

If teens get distracted and stop commenting, parents should encourage them to return to the process with general comments like, "Keep going; tell me everything you're seeing and what you're going to do." When teens repeatedly stop commenting, they may be tired or overwhelmed, signaling that the lesson should end. After the lesson, parents can point out that when drivers stop commenting, their level of alertness goes down.

Parents can also ask questions that help teens understand how commentary driving works after the lesson is over. For example, ask, "Could you practice commentary driving while talking on your cell phone? How do you think talking on a cell phone affects a person's driving?"

Commentary driving can be an effective driver education tool if used properly; parents who invest time and energy in the process help their teens to be better, safer drivers.



Want to pass your DMV Exam the first time?

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The advertisement features a photograph of a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue denim shirt, sitting at a desk and working on a laptop. The background is a warm, brownish-orange color.

How Drugs Affect Driving: Inhalants

Most parents worry that their teens will get involved in illegal drugs, but some parents are unaware of one of the main determinants of whether teens will experiment with drugs - availability. Because they are legal, easily accessible household products, inhalants are one of the most commonly abused drug categories.

According to the 2007 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, 4.6 million teens have tried inhalants. After alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, inhalants are the most frequently-used drug by teens. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, inhalants are one of the first substances abused by children. Though addiction is rare, inhalants can act as a gateway drug when they are replaced with other accessible substances as children age and chase the next high.

Inhalants include solvents, such as paint thinner, gasoline, and glue; gases, such as butane, propane, and nitrous oxide; and aerosol propellants. Experimentation could occur with any household product containing chemicals - spray paint, cleaning products, felt-tip marker fluid, vegetable oil spray, correction fluid.

Inhalants are "sniffed" from an open container or "huffed" from a rag soaked in the substance and held to the face. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, most inhalants cause a quick high similar to alcohol intoxication. The intoxication from inhalants typically only lasts a few minutes, so users often inhale repeatedly over a period of several hours, increasing the risk of adverse effects.

Effects of inhalants include:

- Stimulation
- loss of inhibition
- slurred speech
- loss of motor coordination
- headache
- nausea or vomiting
- wheezing
- loss of sensation
- loss of consciousness
- muscle cramps and weakness
- memory impairment
- weight loss

- depression
- damage to the cardiovascular and nervous systems
- sudden death, even with first-time use

Because abuse of inhalants often occurs at a friend's house or in out-of-the-way places such as in empty parking lots and on dead-end streets, and because driving is viewed as a fun activity by teens, the danger of inhalants can be compounded when teens use inhalants and drive. The intoxication caused by inhalants can cause the same problems as driving under the influence of alcohol - impaired judgment and decision-making, risky driving behavior, and poor motor coordination.

Ensuring that teens don't experiment with inhalants requires a high degree of vigilance on the part of the parent. Inhalants are cheap, legal and easy to obtain, often from the teen's own home. Teens are often not aware of the risk of using inhalants, reasoning that they are harmless household products and that they are only going to be used occasionally.

Parents shouldn't assume that if they don't mention inhalants, it won't occur to teens to use them. At any given time, a teen can be presented with the idea by a friend. In fact, since inhalants are often the first drug used by children, they should be one of the first drug categories parents discuss. Make sure teens know that even common household goods, such as cleaning products, can be harmful - show them the warnings on the labels about using them in well-ventilated areas, and ask them to explain how they think intentionally inhaling the fumes could harm someone. Talk about the risk of sudden death from sniffing or huffing, and ask teens to talk about how they would feel if they were with a friend who died from inhalant abuse. Opportunities for reinforcing the risks of inhalant abuse are everywhere - in [driver training courses](#), in health education classes, in newspaper articles, and on television shows.

Parents may wish to help teens avoid temptation by limiting or banning aerosol spray products such as deodorants, hairspray, fabric protector, and whipped cream. Keep a close watch on teens' bedrooms and recreational areas for empty containers or smelly rags, especially in odd places, like under a bed or chair or in the back of a closet. Parents who suspect inhalant abuse must take action immediately.

Source: NationalSafetyCommission.com ♦

