

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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Teen Driver Dies in Crash Caused by Speeding

A 17-year-old boy died after leaving a high school football game when he was thrown from his vehicle after losing control and crashing into several trees. Police say speed was the major factor in the crash.

Source: NCTimes.com ♦

Lessons Learned

Many teens are so excited to get their driver's licenses that much of the training they received prior to licensure is quickly forgotten. But it's important for new drivers to follow the fundamental rules of the road, and adapting speed to conditions is one rule that's frequently broken.

Driving too fast for conditions is considered [speeding](#) and can result in a traffic ticket. But that's not the only reason to slow down - driving too fast for conditions is a contributing cause of many motor vehicle crashes. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of

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death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2005 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics).

A 2009 analysis of speeding-related crashes by the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) (NHTSA) shows that following the speed limit is not enough to prevent a crash when conditions warrant a reduction in speed. The study showed that in speeding-related crashes that caused one or more injuries, 26% of the crashes were contributed to be exceeding the posted speed limit, while 74% were due to driving too fast for conditions. In property-damage-only crashes where speed was a contributing factor, 18% of the crashes were due to exceeding the posted speed limit and 82% of the crashes were contributed to by driving too fast for conditions. Drivers should reduce their speed:

- **immediately when it begins to rain**
- **when roads are slippery due to snow or ice**
- **in foggy or smoky conditions**
- **before a curve**
- **in construction zones**
- **around school zones and playgrounds**
- **at night**

It's also important to monitor your speed carefully on rural roadways with higher speed limits.

Passengers may encourage the driver to travel at or above the speed limit. Resisting this pressure is an important exercise in maturity for teen drivers and is an integral part of keeping their driver's licenses. Unfortunately, it could even be a life-and-death matter.

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Teen Killed in Crash due to Inexperience, Family Says

A 16-year-old boy has died after losing control of his car and crashing into a wall. Two teen passengers suffered injuries in the collision. Investigators say the teen was driving too fast at the time of the crash; the teen's family also blames lack of driving experience.

Source: [LasVegasNow.com](#) ♦

Lessons Learned

Parents typically feel ambivalent when their teens receive their driver's licenses. They appreciate the freedom from being their teen's sole source of transportation, but they worry that their teens won't be able to handle the corresponding freedom of being behind the wheel on their own. In most states, teens' freedom is limited by Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws. But many parents are unaware of these laws or, if they are aware of them, fail to implement them as house rules.

This is a mistake. Enforcing GDL laws as house rules is an excellent tool for parents, who have the support of an existing law, the need for which and the efficacy of which is fully supported by research. Enforcement of the law by the police, while somewhat irregular in some states, is a very real possibility and could result in legal consequences for the teen. This gives parents additional support from an outside source when enforcing the law in their own households.

Teaching your teen to drive safely is one of your most important responsibilities as a parent, and training shouldn't end when your teen gets a driver's license. The early years of driving are a dangerous time for teens:

- Almost 40% of all deaths for 16- to 19-year-olds occur in motor vehicle crashes.
- Drivers who are age 16-19 are four times more likely to be involved in a crash than older drivers.

The first step in implementing your state's GDL law is to become familiar with it. The law is typically detailed in the first or second chapter of the driver handbook. Many states post their driver handbooks online. You can also find information on GDL laws at your state's Department of Motor Vehicles or Department of Public Safety website. Once you locate the information, save or bookmark it for future reference. GDL laws change as teens mature and gain experience (the "graduated" in Graduated Driver Licensing).

The next step is to help your teen understand the importance of following GDL laws. Begin a dialogue

with your teen before she or he even has a learner's permit. Ask your teen to tell you why she or he thinks GDL laws exist. This helps your teen think and allows them to educate themselves about the process. Make sure your teen understands that GDL laws exist not only to protect teens from themselves, but to protect them from other teens. Your teen needs to follow GDL laws whether she or he is the driver or a passenger. Remind your teen that GDL laws become less stringent as the teen demonstrates responsible driving behavior – it's not just about having another birthday.

Next, incorporate your state's GDL laws into your house rules. For example, newly licensed drivers are typically restricted from driving during certain hours. You can ensure that your teen obeys the law by integrating these time limits into your teen's curfew.

Finally, establish penalties for violating the GDL law or receiving a traffic ticket, whether the violation is for disobeying the GDL law or another offense. Be clear about the penalties from the beginning and relate them to driving by withdrawing driving privileges or enforcing new limits on driving. Help your teen understand all the ramifications of receiving a ticket, such as points on the license, fines, insurance increases, and failure to achieve the next stage in the GDL process. A [Parent-Teen Driving Contract](#) can help you ensure that your teen knows the rules in your household for getting and maintaining driving privileges and the penalties for breaking those rules.

Another important aspect of teaching new drivers is good communication. Ask for your teen's opinion on hazards in your driving environment. You can fill in details garnered from your own experience after your teen has a chance to be heard.

Enforcing the GDL law in your household is a valuable tool that will help ensure your teen's safety behind the wheel.

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Teen Killed in Crash when Friend Runs Stop Sign

A 17-year-old boy died in a crash when the friend he was riding with ran a stop sign. Another car crashed into theirs, throwing the teens' vehicle into a utility pole. The teens' family is worried about how his friends will cope with his death.

Source: KCTV5.com ♦

Lessons Learned

Almost everyone knows a distressing story like this one; deaths of teens due to motor vehicle crashes are often well-publicized amid great community sympathy for the loss of young lives and the potential they held, as well as the devastation of surviving parents and friends. And they speak to a larger statistical reality – that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds, according to the [National Center for Health Statistics](http://NationalCenterforHealthStatistics) – that much of America seems to be both aware of, but unsure of how to change.

Consider the following statistics from the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](http://NationalHighwayTrafficSafetyAdministration) (NHTSA):

- There were 202.8 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2006 (2007 data not available). Young drivers between 15 and 20 years old accounted for 6.4 percent (13.0 million) of the total, a 7.2-percent increase from the 12.1 million young drivers in 1996.
- In 2007, 13 percent (6,982) of all drivers involved in fatal crashes (55,681) were young drivers age 15 to 20 years old, and 15 percent (1,631,000) of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes (10,524,000) were young drivers.
- In 2007, 3,174 15- to 20-year-old drivers were killed and an additional 252,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- Among 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2007, 31 percent of the drivers who were killed had been drinking.
- In 2007, 64 percent of the young drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 75 percent were unrestrained.
- During 2007, 35 percent of the motorcycle riders between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

In addition to the risk teens take when driving or when [riding in a vehicle with other teens](#), teens suffer when a member of their peer group dies in a motor vehicle crash, particularly when they suffer multiple losses from crashes such as the example at the beginning of this article. Because of the feeling of invincibility that is characteristic of this age group, teens typically have not considered the deaths of people their age a possibility, so when such a thing occurs, their world may seem to be crashing down around them. This means that even teens who were not particularly close to the person who died can be stunned by their reaction to it. Due to their level of psychological maturity, teens are ill-equipped to understand the grieving process and may be overwhelmed by feelings of being out-of-control, insecure, and scared, in addition to sorrow and grief. They may descend into melancholy that lasts years, greatly affecting their development. Some teens numb their feelings by participating in high-risk activities such as:

- Alcohol and [drug abuse](#)
- Reckless sexual activity
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Taking risks involving motor vehicles

Depending on the loss, some teens experience a change in their circle of friends. Obviously, this can have positive or negative results, but regardless, it is another change in a rapidly changing world for the teen. Teens who lose friends to death may see their grades drop and their focus change as they struggle to fit into a new group of friends at a time when they feel especially vulnerable.

Parents and other authority figures can help teens channel their grief in healthier ways by:

- Being available to listen – not, necessarily, to talk
- Allowing teens the freedom to process their grief with others, such as friends, extended family, and professional counselors
- Encouraging teens to express themselves through writing, drawing, and memorializing their deceased friends
- Realizing that the teens' mourning process may be prolonged and letting teens know that there is no timetable for grief



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How to Deal with Underage Drinking: Tips for Parents

Restricting your teen's [access to alcohol](#) is one of the most important things you can do for them as a parent. There are highly-publicized risks of fatal alcohol poisonings and devastating motor vehicle crashes due to drinking and driving, for example. But there are other, less-publicized risks that could be equally destructive to your teen's health and well-being, such as increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy, violence and rape, and suicide.

Consequences of underage alcohol use include:

- Early alcohol use, independent of other risk factors, strongly predicts the development of alcohol dependence. Of all people who ever meet the diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence in their lifetime, nearly half do so by age 21 and two-thirds by age 25.
- Due to differences between the adult brain and the brain of the maturing adolescent, many young drinkers:
 - Are able to consume much larger amounts of alcohol than adults before experiencing the negative consequences of drinking, such as [drowsiness](#), lack of coordination, and withdrawal/[hangover](#) effects.
 - Are particularly sensitive to the positive effects of drinking, such as feeling more at ease in social situations; young people may drink more than adults because of these positive social experiences (NIAAA, 2009).
- Recent evidence suggests adolescent drinking can inflict permanent damage on the developing brain (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

To help your teen avoid the use of alcohol and its attendant problems, maintain an ongoing, open dialogue about underage drinking and the risks involved. Make sure she understands that underage drinking is never acceptable. The fact that she is at a party or it is a [special occasion](#) or that some parents might "look the other way" when their teenage children drink alcohol does not change the fact that underage drinking is illegal and very dangerous. If your teen is attending a party at a [friend's house](#), make sure her friends' parents don't

intend to provide alcohol; this is illegal in every state. You might be surprised to discover that other parents plan to provide their teens and their friends with alcohol in a "safe" manner and location. Make sure your teen understands that other adults can't give her permission to drink alcohol.

If you and your teen decide to host a party, make a guest list with your teen. Limit the number of teens so you can be sure of adequate chaperonage. Be sure you have contact information on each teen's parent. Make sure guests and their parents understand that if a teen leaves the party, he won't be allowed to return and parents will be called. Make sure parents who won't be chaperoning know the start and end times of the party and will prearrange transportation. Collect all keys so you can keep track of who is arriving and leaving. Keep coats and purses in an area that can be monitored. Speak to each person before he leaves; check for warning signs of impairment. If a guest arrives at the party already under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, keep him there while you call a parent to pick him up. If he leaves and someone is hurt or injured, you could be held responsible.

When your teen spends the night at a friend's house or goes to a party, call the hosting parent to find out the details. Make sure the hosting parent shares your concerns about the availability of alcohol and that none will be permitted. Volunteer to chaperone and provide transportation. Let your teen know that you will not approve any outing without sufficient notice so you can speak to the hosting parent first. If your teen will be riding anywhere, at any time, with a friend, make sure it is with someone whose parents do not permit the use of alcohol. Teens are at great risk when [riding with other teens](#), even under the best of circumstances. Talk to your teen about a back-up plan in case something goes wrong.

Create a code with your teen so he can signal for help without attracting the attention of friends. If you don't know how to text, ask your teen to give you a few lessons; texting is a much easier way for you to communicate than via phone. When you arrive to pick up your teen, he can blame you for having to leave or you can give the excuse of a "family emergency." Make an agreement that if you do have to pick him up, a discussion about the reason can be tabled until the next morning, when you and your teen are both calm and safe. Otherwise, your teen may avoid calling you for help because he doesn't want you to know about the circumstances that required the ride home.

Finding a balance between being too controlling and allowing too much freedom will require constant effort, but it is a worthwhile endeavor. Your teen's health and happiness may depend on it.

Source: [NationalSafetyCommission.com](#) ♦