

# Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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## Teen Killed In Early Morning Crash

A 16 year old driver lost control of her vehicle on a curve and crashed into a stone mailbox. A 16 year old passenger in the back seat, who was not wearing a seat belt, was killed in the crash. Both the driver and another 16 year old passenger in the front seat who were wearing seat belts receive only minor injuries.

The driver has been charged with second-degree vehicular homicide, driving too fast for conditions, failure to maintain a lane, and other minor charges.

Source: [ajc.com](http://ajc.com) ♦

## Lessons Learned

There are three issues involved in this crash. The first, and most important, is the fact that the teen who was killed was not wearing a seat belt. The other two teens were wearing seat belts and were only slightly injured. They are lucky!

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Seat belts save lives! However too many teens ignore that fact. The teens in the front seat were lucky that they were not struck and injured or killed by the back seat passenger as her body was flung forward in the crash.

Too many people forget that the laws of physics come into play and, in a crash, anything in the vehicle that isn't secured will continue flying forward at whatever speed the vehicle was traveling up to the point of impact. There is no way that an unbelted person in the vehicle can brace for the blow and prevent injury.

Speed and weight determine the crash forces of an unsecured object. As both weight and speed increase, the crash forces increase exponentially. A [crash force calculator](#) created by the physics department of Georgia State University shows that an unbelted 100 pound girl involved in a 25 mph crash will hit the dashboard with an impact force of 2,090 pounds.

Speed was also an issue in this crash. Any driver who loses control of the vehicle on a curve is traveling too fast for conditions. That doesn't necessarily mean that the driver is traveling above the posted speed limit. Rain slicked or icy roads can create conditions that make it unsafe to travel at the posted speed limit. Sharp curves also make it dangerous for drivers who don't slow down before entering the curve. Many winding and curving roads will post an "advisory speed limit" sign prior to the curve. The "advisory speed" limit sign is a yellow warning sign meaning that drivers are "advised" to reduce their speed to the advisory speed. It is not against the law to heed the advisory speed limit but a driver who was traveling above the advisory speed limit can be charged if a collision occurs as a result. Even if there isn't an advisory speed sign, drivers are still responsible for adjusting their speed to conditions and can still be charged with driving too fast for conditions even if they are obeying the posted speed limit.

in her first year as a driver. In the state where the driver was licensed, the GDL limits the number of passengers a driver under the age of 18 can carry. For the first six months after receiving an operator's license, no passengers (other than family members) under the age of 21 are allowed. In the second six months, no more than one passenger under the age of 21 is allowed. In this crash there were two 16 year old passengers. It isn't clear which six month period this driver was in but unless the occupants of this vehicle were triplets, it appears that this driver was in violation of the GDL law.

The reason that the various state GDL laws limit the number of teen passengers is that studies have clearly shown that the more teens in a car, the greater the distractions to the teen driver. According to the National Highway Traffic Administration, "with three or more passengers, the fatal crash risk is about three times higher than when a beginner is driving alone. Passenger presence is a major contributor to the teenage death toll. Half of crash deaths that involve 16-year-old drivers occur when the beginners drive with teen passengers. Studies indicate that passenger restrictions can reduce this problem."

Driver distractions take the driver's full attention away from the very important task of paying attention to the driving environment.

We tend to forget that driving is quite a complicated task and it is even more so for a young, inexperienced driver. Parents need to ensure that their teen driver obeys all the laws of the state including the GDL passenger restrictions. Even if there is no GDL law in your state, parents need to set limits on the number of passengers and follow up with consequences if the teen violates that restriction.

## Teens Sentenced For Fatal Car Crashes

- A high school senior who said he didn't expect forgiveness for a drunken driving crash that killed one classmate and seriously injured another, was sentenced to serve **at least nine months in a juvenile detention camp** for gross vehicular manslaughter.
- The teenager who caused a car crash that killed three people was sentenced to **a year in jail** for negligent homicide.
- A 19 year old girl was sentenced to **one to four years in state prison** after pleading guilty in Oswego County Court to vehicular manslaughter, second degree for a DUI crash that killed her boyfriend.

- A 18 year old teen who was the driver in a fatal car crash has been sentenced to **five years in prison** for manslaughter.

Source: google.com ♦

## Lessons Learned

These are just a few of the many instances of teens sentenced to jail in the month of December for their involvement in a car crash that killed someone else. The pain of the sentence is usually compounded by the fact that the person they were responsible for killing was a close friend.

Teens always seem to operate in the belief that "It'll never happen to me." but for too many teens each year it does happen to them and their lives are forever altered as a result.

When it comes to driving, teens need to understand the concept of "Life Decisions". A life decision is a decision that someone makes that will have an effect on the rest of their life. Decisions such as: dropping out of school, picking the right college, getting married, or joining the military are all life decisions. Few people, not just teens, realize that, under certain circumstances, getting behind the wheel of a car can be a life decision.

In considering driving and life decisions, it is important to remember that there is rarely any such thing as an auto "accident". Accidents are events that can't be predicted or prevented. Being struck by lightning is an accident. Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, choosing to drive too fast for conditions, or allowing yourself to be distracted by cell phones or other vehicle occupants are not accidents. They are conscious choices that drivers make every day and they have tragic consequences for more than 5,000

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teens a year. In addition to the deaths, more than 220,000 teens are injured every year with many disabled for life.

Not only teens but all drivers need to understand that every decision they make behind the wheel of a car can, potentially, be a life decision, affecting not only their life but the lives of many others.

## Tips for Parent: Are You Prepared To Teach Your Teen To Drive?

Are you prepared to teach your teen to drive? How will you do it? Can you remain calm and reassuring so that you won't upset your teen and increase the danger? Do you know how to start and the tools you will need? It's not as easy as you might think.

If you consider yourself a safe and responsible driver, the driving skills that you now take for granted were developed over many years. You have learned many lessons as a driver either through getting a ticket, close calls, or from having been involved in collisions yourself. As an adult you can also take the lessons of others and apply them to your own driving environment.

Now, remember back to how you felt when you were 15 or 16. Was your driving attitude then the same as it is now? Teens have a sense of invincibility, thinking that nothing bad will ever happen to them. They rarely have the wisdom or experience to take the lessons of others and apply it to their own life. They have to learn on their own. That is why it is critical that you provide those lessons in a safe environment so that they can learn the lessons needed.

The problem with parents teaching teens to drive in the US is that those parents are rarely prepared to teach. You have spent years trying to keep your child safe and now you will be teaching them to operate a machine that has the capability of killing them. There is no more important task.

To teach your child to drive, you have to start preparing early before they are old enough to get their learner's permit. Before you start, you need to ask yourself some hard questions and give very honest answers. Some questions you should ask yourself are:

- What kind of driving example am I setting for my child?  
– Are you really a safe driver? Do you routinely speed? Do you try to make it through the yellow light at the last moment instead of stopping as the law requires? Do you tailgate? Your child has been watching you drive for years and has been picking up your bad driving habits. If you are guilty of any of the items listed above, you need to change your driving behavior and let your teen know why.

- Do you remain calm behind the wheel or do you rant and rave at the driving environment? – It is very difficult to remain calm and keep your anger in check in today's driving environment but it is important to remember that our emotions play a big part in how we drive. Anger and frustration, while understandable, is a distraction that can lead us to take chances we might not otherwise take. Learning to accept the driving situation as it is, adapting to it by learning to leave early and keeping your anger in check will make you a much safer driver and you will pass that on to your teen.
- You studied the driver's manual when you first got your license but are you familiar with it now? - Some things have changed. For example, experts no longer suggest one car length for every 10 mph of speed as a safe following distance. Instead, that rule has been replaced with the two second following distance. You may want to get a copy of the manual and start studying.
- Do you know all the signs? - Do you know a sign's meaning based on its shape and color alone? What is the shape and color of a regulatory sign or a road services sign? This is important information and you should start teaching the meaning of the signs before your teen gets his or her learner's permit.
- Can you parallel park? – Do you know the proper way to enter and exit a slanted parking space in a parking lot?

Before starting to teach your teen to drive you should start studying and devour the internet for tips and demonstrations. Youtube.com. can be a good source. For links to some good youtube sites, you can visit the National Safety Commission's youtube channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/NationalSafetyComm>

You may want to consider attending a driving school and even taking a lesson or two from a behind-the-wheel driving instructor to learn some teaching methods.

Watch this column in the future for tips on how to teach your teen to drive.



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