



Driving Safety

Do you have your driver's permit or license or are you getting ready to take the test? Congratulations! Being able to drive can make it a lot easier to hang out with your friends, get to school, do errands, and get to work. It's great to enjoy your independence, but most importantly, be safe when you're behind the wheel. Read on to learn some facts about accidents and ways you can become a safe driver.

The Facts:

- **Automobile accidents are the leading cause of death for teens in the United States.**
- Teen drivers between the ages of 16–19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash (*per mile driven*).
- Crash risk is the highest during the first year that a teenager has his/her license.
- In 2008, 9 teens between the ages of 16–19 died every day from a motor vehicle injury.
- 3,500 teens between the ages of 15–19 were killed and more than 350,000 were treated in emergency rooms for auto-accident related injuries, in 2008.

Becoming a Good Driver

How can I become a good driver?

Becoming a good driver takes time and experience. Taking a "Driver's Ed" class is a smart way to get started and prepare for your written exam and get the experience you'll need before you take your road test. In fact, once a permit is issued to a teen, many states *require* **driver education classes** to be taken. These programs, whether given at school or through a private business require both classroom hours and time "behind-the-wheel" (*actual driving*). Some behind-the-wheel time will be with the instructor, and some with a parent or other adult. Check out the DMV (**Department of Motor Vehicles**) regulations for your state. Another added bonus of taking Driver's Ed is that the cost of your parent's car insurance (*or your own*) may be reduced after you complete the training.

Before you turn the key in the ignition:

- Spend time sitting in the driver's seat of the car you'll be driving
- Become familiar with the dashboard and settings and what all the symbols mean including the warning lights
- Practice turning on the windshield wipers (*before it rains*)
- Locate the emergency brake
- Locate the gas tank and learn how to open it and pump gas
- Learn about the basic parts of the car and where they are located (*engine, battery, etc.*)
- Adjust the side and rear view mirrors so that you can see the cars behind you and from either side of you
- Check to make sure your headlights and high beams work
- Find out how to check the tire pressure
- Find out where the "car instruction manual" is kept

When you're first learning how to drive

Driving can be scary and nerve-wracking in the beginning. Whether you practice driving with your teacher, your parent/guardian, a sibling, or another adult, the more you drive the more comfortable and skilled you will become. When you are first learning, you'll be most comfortable driving on clear, sunny days in areas close to home, without a lot of traffic. Eventually, you'll be ready to try driving on bigger roads, at night, and in different weather conditions such as rain or snow.

Remember: Never drive anywhere without a trusted adult when you are first learning how to drive.

Safety Tips

Driving Safety Tips:

- **Always wear your seatbelt** whether you're the driver or passenger; every car, every time!
- Follow your state's laws about when you can drive and with whom. If you don't follow the rules and you get stopped by the police, you can have your permit taken away or lose your license.
- Always turn off your cell phone; it's distracting and will take your attention away from the road.
- Never ever text while driving – know your state's laws and the legal consequences.
- Never use earphones; you'll need to be able to hear sounds such as horns and sirens.
- Avoid changing the radio station or CD's while driving. If you're listening to music, keep it at a reasonable volume so you can hear sirens, car horns, and other noises.
- If you need to make a call or do something that requires your full attention, pull over to a well lit, safe area.
- NEVER use drugs or alcohol before or while driving.
- If you are sleepy, pull over to a safe area. If you have another licensed driver in the car, ask them to drive.
- Always keep a safe distance between you and the car in front of you (*this will give you plenty of space to stop if the car ahead of you stops suddenly*).
- Know the speed limit of the road you are driving on and be sure to follow it.
- Be sure to have an **Emergency Plan** – know how to contact your parent(s)/guardian(s) or another responsible adult, in case you have car trouble or you get lost.

Never get into a car if the driver has been drinking or using drugs. Always have a designated driver whom you can trust to remain sober and straight. In many states there are consequences for being the passenger in a car in which alcohol or drugs are found or used.

What should I keep in the car?

Keep the following items in the car or in your wallet when you are driving:

- Your license
- Car registration
- Name and phone number of your insurance company
- A card with a list of **emergency contacts** (*parent(s) or guardian(s), car owners*)
- Your ID card, if you have a membership to a **roadside assistance plan** (*such as AAA*)
- Flashlight, batteries, and jumper cables; and a shovel (*during the winter in snowy climates*)
- Blanket, water, nonperishable food (*such as granola bars in case of an emergency*)
- First aid kit
- Small notebook and pen (*to take notes if you are in an accident*)

Car Accidents

What do I do if I have a car accident?

If you have an accident, whether it's just a small fender bender or a more serious collision, you'll need to:

- Take a few deep breaths and try to stay focused so you can assess the situation.
- Know if it was a minor accident (*no physical injuries*) or a major accident (*people are hurt and there is a lot of damage to the vehicles*).
- Move your car to the side of the road out of the way of oncoming traffic, if you don't have any serious injuries and your car is drivable.
- Keep your seatbelt on and stay in the car until help arrives – if the accident is more serious and there are injuries or your car can't be moved.
- Put your hazard lights on.
- (*Minor accidents*) Park your car in a safe area, turn the engine off and get your emergency kit. Set up flares or orange cones around your car.
- Turn your phone on and call for help; dial 911 or call *77 on your cell phone – tell the police where you are and if anyone is injured. Do this in a safe area.
- Be prepared to tell the dispatcher your name, where you/your car is located, and if anyone is injured. (*Sometimes the police will only come to a crash scene if someone is hurt or if your car isn't drivable*).

- Try to remain calm. Don't yell or blame others, just focus on making sure that you and the other drivers or passengers are okay then get ready to collect information.

What kind of information do I need to get from the other driver(s)?

Once you know that you and all of the people involved in the crash are okay, calmly ask to see the other driver(s) license and registration.

Write down the following information (only if you are able to do so):

- Name, address, license number and registration for each driver involved
- Name of each driver's car insurance company
- Year, make and model of the cars involved
- Location, time and weather conditions and any other details that you can remember
- Draw a picture of the street; whether it's a cross road, if traffic was going both ways, etc.

O.K., I have got the information from the other drivers. What next?

Next, you'll need to talk with your parent(s) or guardian(s) and then call your insurance company. You'll need to explain how the accident happened to the best of your ability. If you've collected all or most of the information above, it will be easy to answer most (if not all) of the questions that the insurance agent asks you.

Driving is a privilege that comes with a lot of responsibility. When you get your license and gain experience, driving will become part of your everyday life. It is important to understand the risks with driving so you can protect yourself and others.

Frequently Asked Questions

All my friends are excited about learning to drive, but I don't have any interest at all! Is there something wrong with me?

No! Don't learn to drive until **you** want or need to. Many people who live in cities or other places with public transportation don't feel the need to drive. Others choose not to drive for environmental or financial reasons. Either way, the choice is up to you.

I really want to learn to drive! I am taking a driver's education class and doing well in the classroom part, but when I get behind the wheel I get really nervous. Will I ever stop being so nervous?

Yes! Like many things in life, learning and skill go hand-in-hand. You will become more confident with experience. **Practice, practice, practice.** You may find that some people are easier to drive with than others, such as one parent or sibling instead of another. Try to arrange as much behind-the-wheel time with them as possible.

My parents are super-strict about letting me borrow their car, even though I've never gotten into an accident. How can I get them to trust me more (and use their car more often)?

Many parents are very cautious about letting their newly licensed children use the family car. Talk with your parents about their concerns. Find out what worries them and address their concerns as specifically as possible. The more you are able to show them that you can follow through while being trustworthy, the easier it will be for all of you.

You can:

- Offer to drive your parents somewhere so they can experience your being a safe driver.
- Pay for the gas you use and/or a portion of their car insurance (*which is higher now that you are on the policy*).
- Figure out a way to keep in touch when you have the car, such as calling/texting them when you arrive at a destination, and again right before you are ready to drive home.
- Never violate your curfew.
- Know your state's laws about driving and let your parent(s)/guardian(s) know that you are aware of the laws and consequences for violating them.

Is it okay for me to drive my friends around?

Check out your state laws. Many states don't allow you to drive other teens or kids (*except your family members*) for at least 6 or 12 months after you get your license. Even if your state allows it, it is best to wait 6 months because talking to your friends can take your attention away from the road (*especially if they're making a lot of noise*). Teens with attention difficulties such as ADD and ADHD should make special efforts to avoid distractions. Having an adult passenger in the car can lessen your chance of getting into a car crash.

I'm finally 'legal' to drive my friends around. Sometimes they act loud and crazy in the car and it is distracting. How can I tell them to act calmer in my car?

Congratulations for making it to this driving milestone! It does come with responsibility though, and you have every right as the driver to be in charge of what happens when you are driving other people in your car. Don't be shy about asking anyone in the car to settle down, turn down the music, or behave appropriately when you are driving. If you feel things are getting out-of-hand and you are becoming distracted, pull over in a safe area and talk with them. Explain to your friends that you simply can't drive like this and that you won't continue until they all promise to settle down. In the future, carefully consider whom you allow in your car.

Is it OK to ask my friends to chip in for gas?

Your friends should offer first (*especially if you will be traveling a long distance*), but if they don't, it's fine to ask them to chip in for gas. It usually works out best if you talk with your friend(s) about it before you leave for your destination. That way they can plan on helping you with the cost of gas.

I've had my license for about a year and got into a little 'fender-bender' when I was trying to park. My parents haven't noticed the scrape on the car yet. I don't want them to get angry and tell me I can't use the car. What should I do?

It's always important to let an adult know about ANY damage that is done to the car, even when it seems very minor. Everyone needs to know that the car is safe to drive. It's best to be honest and tell your parent(s)/guardian(s) as soon as possible and explain to them what happened and that you were not hurt. Show them the damage and offer to help pay for the repair. This will show them that you take responsibility for your actions, understand the consequences, and are behaving maturely as if it were your own car.

I had an accident a few weeks ago and I still feel anxious every time I get in the car. Is this normal?

It's normal to feel upset after an accident, particularly if you are a new driver. Car accidents are called "accidents" for a reason!

You may want to drive with a trusted adult the next few times you drive after the accident until you gain more confidence.

If you continue to be anxious about getting in a car comfortably, make an appointment with your health care provider.

What should I do if I get pulled over by a police officer?

Most likely the police will not pull you over unless there is a real reason. If you see police lights behind you or you see an officer making a gesture to pull you over, do it as soon as it is safely possible. Stay in the car; the police officer will come to you. Put down the window and wait until the officer asks you for your license and registration. You may want to let the officer know that you need to get the registration out of the glove compartment. Be polite and honest when the officer asks you questions. You may get a ticket or you may get a warning. Don't argue about anything being "unfair". Everyone has the legal right to appeal a ticket.