

Parents, Teens and the Learner Stage

★ ★ ★ ★ Teen Driver Safety

The Situation:

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers in the U.S.
- Over 800,000 young drivers ages 15 – 18 were involved in police-reported crashes in 2008.
 - An estimated 350,000 people were injured in these crashes, and 3,431 people were killed.
 - Among those killed were 1,368 drivers ages 15-18, 977 of their passengers, and 1,155 other people (pedestrians, cyclists, and occupants of other vehicles).
- Nearly all 50 states have implemented some form of a graduated driver licensing (GDL) system for young drivers.
- All but four states require new drivers, under age 18, to hold a learner's permit for at least 6 months, during which time driving is only allowed while being supervised by a licensed adult driver.
- Before this study, there has been little research on the nature or quality of parental supervision during the learner stage of graduated licensing.

The Study:

- In-depth study of 50 families with novice teenage drivers (with learner permits) in North Carolina:
 - Interviewed parents 10 times over the year-long learner period.
 - Installed cameras in families' vehicles for a 4-month period shortly after teens obtained a learner permit.
 - Compiled and analyzed more than 2,000 video clips of interaction between teens and their parents while the teens were practicing driving.
 - Examined the type, frequency, and duration of practice, variation in driving conditions (e.g., traffic, weather, type of road, time of day), and problems or challenges that teens and parents encountered along the way.

Key Findings:

- When parents were asked about their plans for their teens' driving, roughly half reported they wanted their teens to get "a lot of practice." However, only about one in four mentioned practicing under a variety of situations or conditions (e.g., different types of roads, traffic conditions, etc.). And, most of the actual driving experience was obtained under relatively benign conditions.

Teens have the highest crash rate of any group in the United States.



- On average, parents reported teens drove 1.60 hours per week spread over 3.2 days. There was substantial variability between families in the average amount of weekly driving, ranging from just 20 minutes to almost 5 hours.
- Parents cited many reasons why their teen didn't receive more practice:
 - Nearly 70% of parents cited the busy schedules of both themselves and their teen as a reason why teens did not spend more time driving.
 - Two in five families (40%) cited the disinterest of the teen as a reason for not driving.
- According to both parent reports and video clips, much of the teen driving occurred on "routine trips" under relatively benign conditions. Teens drove less frequently under more challenging settings such as highways, inclement weather, darkness, heavy traffic, or country roads.
- In the final interview, at the end of one year—at which time teens were eligible to obtain their license—nearly half of parents (47%) reported there was at least one condition in which they still were not comfortable allowing their teen to drive unsupervised, most commonly in heavy traffic, on highways, or in the rain. Nonetheless, 37% of these families allowed their teen to obtain a license within a month of being eligible.
- The most common form of parental instruction observed involved vehicle handling or operation (e.g., "you need to slow down"), which was found in 54% of clips. Higher order instruction such as visual scanning or anticipating the behavior of other drivers was found in just 5% of clips.

Video footage from the study is available at <http://www.aaafoundation.org/multimedia/index.cfm?button=LTDclips>. Below are other useful teen driver resources:

[Driver-Zed](#) – An interactive risk-management training tool designed to help teens recognize how to react in a variety of driving scenarios.

[AAA StartSmart](#) – AAA StartSmart is a newsletter system designed to help families get through the crucial period when teens are learning to drive safely during their first year or two of licensed driving. A key component is the AAA Parent-Teen Driving Agreement.

[Dare To Prepare](#) – Dare to Prepare is a 90-minute pre-permit presentation for parents and teens that provides critical information teens need to know before they take the wheel. This presentation walks attendees through the steps necessary to obtain a permit and a driver's license, and offers useful tools to help parents and teens through the learning-to-drive process. A shorter, online version of the program is now available at www.teendriving.aaa.com.

[Teaching Your Teen To Drive](#) – AAA's Teaching Your Teens to Drive program comes complete with an illustrated in-car handbook, and live-action 60-minute DVD that parents can use to help them conduct state-required supervised practice driving.