

Helping Your Teen Become a Safer Driver

As a parent, you ultimately want your teen to be well-trained and as safe as possible when behind the wheel or as a passenger in someone else's vehicle. Learning how to physically handle a vehicle is just one part of becoming a safe driver. It's important that parents play an active role in helping their teens develop their decision making skills as well as their vehicle handling skills.

Before Your Teen is Driving:

- Your children are watching you. Practice what you preach. Be a positive role model when you're behind the wheel. Your teen is more likely to be a calm and courteous driver, wear a seat belt and follow the rules of the road if they see you do the same.
- Discuss the risks and responsibilities of driving with your child at a young age and keep talking to your teen before, during and after the licensing process. This discussion should have the same — or even higher priority level — as discussing sex and drugs.
- Empower your teen. Being a passenger in another teen's car can put your teen at risk. Peer pressure among teens can be both positive and negative. Make sure your teen knows it's okay to say something if uncomfortable while riding with a friend and help him/her practice what to say in these situations. Although you can't be with your teen at all times, you can say how important it is that your teen speaks up in dangerous situations.

During the Pre-License Learning Stage:

- Don't rush the training process. Just because a teen has a license, it doesn't mean they're ready for every driving situation or condition. Nothing can replace the many hours of supervised driving experience they need with you while learning how to handle most of the challenges they will eventually encounter independently.
- Understand Minnesota's graduated driver licensing laws and discuss them with your teen. Using these laws as a minimum standard, establish your own family rules for when, where, how, and with whom your teen may drive by creating a Parent-Teen Driving Contract. It's important that you set reasonable rules and limits that minimize risks, and follow through with consequences when problems arise.

When Your Teen is Licensed:

- Make decisions with your teen's safety as the highest priority. Even after receiving their license, teens are not prepared to drive on their own in every situation or during times of higher crash risk. Only you can decide when your teen is ready to drive without adult supervision in more challenging and risky situations.
- When your teen demonstrates his/her ability to drive safely, adhere to laws, and follow your family rules, you can consider allowing additional driving privileges. Privileges should still be based on limiting their exposure to crash risks. If problems arise after additional privileges are granted, go back to using the rules that were in place before.

Positive Parenting is Ideal

POSITIVE PARENTING

is warm, supportive and encouraging while being firm, consistent and clear with limits and boundaries.

- HIGH Nurturance
- HIGH Expectations
- HIGH Respect

"I'm important in my teen's life. We have some good times & some bad times, but I'm there for the long run."

DOMINATING PARENTING

is harsh, punitive and rigid.

- LOW Nurturance
- HIGH Expectations
- LOW Respect

"I need to really clamp down now that he's a teen. If you give him an inch, he'll take a mile."

PERMISSIVE PARENTING

is inconsistent enforcement of rules, or no rules at all, and a need to be a pal more than a parent.

- HIGH Nurturance
- LOW Expectations
- MODERATE Respect

"I really want to enjoy parenting my teen. It's important for them to fit in, have what they want, & not have too many rules. We get along better that way."

UNENGAGED PARENTING

is inconsistent presence in a child's life – teens raise themselves.

- LOW Nurturance
- HIGH Expectations
- LOW Respect

"It's time to let go now that my child's grown up. It's time to get my needs met. He can take care of himself."

Positive Parents:

Provide **LIMITS**. Give clear **RULES** and **BOUNDARIES** while **ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE**

RESEARCH SAYS:

Teens raised by **POSITIVE** parents:

- Do better in school
- Have lower rates of depression and stress
- Are less likely to engage in risky behavior
- Have better social skills
- Are more respectful
- Deal better with conflict

Positive parenting has been shown to be the most effective parenting style. This is true across different cultural, racial and economic groups.

Teens Need Rules

FIRM RULES: Some rules are firm and not to be changed whether your teen agrees with them or not. These rules are understood by both parents and teens. Use firm rules when:

- Physical or emotional health and safety is at stake
- The family's values are at stake

FLEXIBLE RULES: Some rules are open for discussion and can be negotiated, waived or changed, if there is a good reason. Use flexible rules when:

- It's not a health and safety issue
- The issue doesn't affect or compromise your family's values