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*Clover Connection*

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## 10 Things Parents May Not Know About Teen Driver Safety

Motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for teens 15-to-19 years old in the U.S. and in Texas. And, it is not just the teen drivers at risk, it is also their passengers and younger teens, who are not even driving yet, that are at risk. Driver inexperience is one of the main reasons that teens are more likely to be in a crash. Parents have more influence over their teens than they may think. First, parents should be familiar with the Graduated Driver License Law (GDL) that protects teen drivers in the beginning stages of their driving. Parents should get involved with their teens and stay involved through their teen driving years to make sure they follow good driving habits and to set good examples with their own driving behavior.

Here is a list from the National Safety Council on the top 10 things that parents may not know about teen driving safety:

1. Car crashes are the number one killer of teens in the U.S.
2. The most dangerous year of a teen's life is the year he or she receives a driver's license
3. Half of all teens will be involved in a car crash before graduating from high school
4. A teen's crash risk is three-times that of more experienced drivers
5. After years of declines, teen driving crashes and fatalities are on the rise
6. Just one teen passenger can increase a teen driver's crash risk by 44 percent
7. Seventy-five percent of teen driver crashes occur because the teen made a critical error due to inexperience, such as driving too fast for conditions, not scanning for hazards, or being distracted
8. Fifty-two percent of teens who are killed in a car crash are unbelted
9. Cell phones are a huge influence of distraction for already inexperienced teen drivers, yet 12 states still allow some form of cell phone use for novice drivers

10. About 20 percent of teen car crashes involve an underage drinking driver

That's why Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Passenger Safety department reminds parents to talk to their teens about staying safe on the road. Remember, one of the most important safety features for your teen driver is YOU.

A study published under the National Institutes of Health showed that teens with parents who set rules, monitor their driving, and are supportive, are half as likely to crash, and twice as likely to use seat belts, as teens with less involved parents. Parents can help by talking with their teens about safe driving practices.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reminds parents to:

- Learn about the GDL law and be familiar with the restrictions placed on your teen's license — it can better assist you to enforce those laws. You have the opportunity to establish some important ground rules for your teen driver. Here are the Texas GDL requirements:
  - During Phase I of the Texas GDL, the teen driver must always be accompanied by a person at least 21 years of age
  - During Phase 2, teens cannot operate a motor vehicle with more than one passenger who is younger than 21-years-old, unless the additional passengers are also family members
  - Driving is prohibited between midnight and 5 a.m., unless the teen is driving to attend work or a school-related activity, or responding to an emergency
  - Cell phone use is also prohibited during both phases of the GDL and for all drivers under the age of 18
- Require seat belt use always
- Talk to your teen about the dangers of drug and alcohol use. Remind them that it is illegal to drink under the age of 21, and it is illegal — and deadly — to drink and drive. If a teen is under 21, his or her blood alcohol concentration (BAC) should always be at .00, not just under .08, which is the legal limit for drivers over age 21.
- Be a good role model. Remember that your child looks to you as a driver, so practice safe driving yourself. Set aside time to take your teen on practice driving sessions. It can be a great way to spend time together and to allow your teen to improve some basic driving skills. Your teen's learning starts at home.
- Don't rely solely on a driver's education class to teach your teen to drive. Remember that driver's education should be used as just part of a GDL system.

Bottom line is that as a parent you need to know the dangers that teen driving poses. You have more influence on your teen than you may think. Be a good example and get involved in their driving habits from the beginning, and stay involved for the duration of their teen years.

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