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For Parents: How to Avoid Teenage Car Accidents

Earning a drivers license is a powerful rite of passage for any American teenager. In addition to increased mobility, the state-issued certificate represents freedom many new drivers. But to parents, a teenager's driver's license is more complicated, as it represents the potential for danger in the form of reckless driving and car accidents. Although anecdotal evidence has shown that teenagers are generally dangerous drivers, parents and municipalities can take simple steps to ensure that their teens remain safe on city streets and highways and avoid dangerous driving.

The first major obstacles facing teenagers when they start driving is an unavoidable lack of brain development that can lead to slower reaction times and an increased likelihood to take risks. A new study by the National Institute of Mental Health has found that this lack of brain development is not the fault of individual drivers. Since the aspect of brain development most important for drivers is white matter in the frontal lobe, the report notes, the spread of white matter from back to front could be responsible for the relative lack of emotional maturity and motor skills leading to more dangerous driving for teenagers.

The NIMH does not suggest that the teen brain development science suggests that parents should throw in the towel on teenage safety. Instead, most safety advocates have said that states should implement graduated drivers license laws, which stagger driver rights and responsibilities as teen drivers become more experienced and responsible behind the wheel. Teen drivers in California, for example, are issued drivers licenses at the age of 15 years and 6 months, at which time they can only drive with a parent. At 16, California teenagers are issued a restricted license, which stipulates that they cannot drive between the hours of 11 pm and 5 am for a year, when they are granted an unrestricted license at the age of 17.

The best technique to assure motor safety for teenagers is often educating them about the unique dangers associated with driving and to determine reachable benchmarks of safety success. One method often used by parents is to collaborate with their children to develop a parent-teen safe driving contract with concrete goals related to obeying street signs, avoiding distracted driving, and carrying passengers. If the teen follows the contract, he or she should receive a reward. If the teen breaks the contract, certain driving privileges should be taken away.

Sure, graduated license laws and parent-teen safe driving contracts can help make teenagers better drivers. But the best thing for parents to do is be safe drivers themselves, hoping that their children will emulate this behavior when they get behind the wheel themselves.

More Information:

<http://www.gjel.com/news/safe-driving-contract.html>
<http://www.gjel.com/news/teen-brain-development.html>
<http://www.gjel.com/news/car-accident-checklist.html>