

# WELCOMING YOUR NEW DRIVER



**Parent Guide**

# ARE YOU READY FOR THIS?



**Y**esterday, you were putting them on the school bus. Today, you are handing over the car keys. Before you do, AAA can recommend some stress-reducing practices that will help safeguard your teen and give you more peace of mind.




Graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws already place some protective restrictions on new young drivers. As a parent, you also need to create guidelines that will help your young driver gain experience with minimal risk. The information in this brochure will help you set expectations with your teen.

Though your teen may not have spent much time behind the wheel yet, they have already gained a lot of vicarious experience ... good and bad. They have observed your driving habits. They've seen fast and furious car chases on the big and small screen. They may play computer-based racing games that reward quick hand-to-eye coordination and aggression at the expense of good judgment.

*Though your teen may not have spent much time behind the wheel yet, they have already gained a lot of vicarious experience ...good and bad.*

As a parent, it's up to you to help your teen arrive at a realistic understanding of his or her obligations and the need to build skills, judgment, and experience.

It's easy to overlook, but teens also need your guidance in living up to the responsibilities and obligations that go along with operating a vehicle — such as choosing a safe vehicle, insuring and



maintaining it, and obeying all laws related to licensing and inspection.

Shaping your teen's driving habits also is a great opportunity to reinforce traits that will serve them throughout life, including accountability, personal responsibility, respect for people and property, consideration of others, the ability to budget, and an appreciation for actions and consequences.

This brochure is a good starting point in your discussion as your teen enters the driving years.

We hope you will find it helpful as you orient the new driver in your family.

*A recent study by the National Institutes of Health suggests that parental involvement and restrictions significantly reduce risky driving behavior during a driver's first 12–18 months behind the wheel.*

## WELCOMING YOUR NEW DRIVER

**D** *Driving entails risks and responsibilities for the new driver, but the consequences of your teen's decisions can extend to your entire family.*

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for American teenagers. Per miles driven, the crash rate for teens 16 to 19 is four times higher than for adults. This crash risk is even higher during the first year a teenager is eligible to drive.

Often, teens become the family chauffeur. That means younger siblings are also at this higher risk of injury as passengers in "teen" crashes. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that nearly two of every three people killed in teen-driver crashes are people *other* than the teen driver.

As the parent of a new driver, you take on new legal and financial liability. If your teen is involved in a crash, you may bear the cost of damages, medical expenses, legal counsel, repair costs, fines, and increased insurance premiums. Further, if your teen injures or kills a pedestrian or another motorist, the emotional and legal consequences will be overwhelming for everyone concerned.

Driver education is a good start, but it is not enough. Supplement formal driving classes/in-car sessions by sharing your experience and knowledge.



**YOUR HELP  
DOES MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE.**

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Just a handful of good habits can make a life-or-death difference.

Your personal example and encouragement can help your teen learn to consistently:

- successfully perceive events in the driving scene;
- make good decisions based on driver perceptions;
- take safe and effective action to prevent potential conflicts and collisions;
- drive the speed limit;
- maintain safe following distance;
- wear safety belts.

It is imperative that you make it clear to your teen that it is never acceptable to drive when impaired by alcohol, other drugs, anger, or fatigue.

What's the strongest way to deliver that message?

## LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

*You cannot control all of the conditions your new driver will face, but you can set standards and expectations that will limit the risks.*

## PARENTS AS CO-PILOTS

**D** *Driving is licensed by the state, but for a teen, it is a privilege granted by parents. It is completely appropriate to insist on some say regarding how and when a new driver gets behind the wheel, even if he or she is not driving the family car.*

Parental responsibility does not end when the teen has a permit in hand. Recent studies find that teens demonstrate the safest driving behavior when parents remain involved in driver education even after teens are licensed drivers.

Your obligation goes beyond helping your child secure a permit and then a license. You must help your teen become a safe driver. It's a continuing effort, but well worth it.

How can you help?

- Invest in driver training from a reputable organization.
- Commit to a practice schedule. Accompany your teen on practice drives in increasingly challenging locations and conditions. The risk of a crash drops significantly among teens that have been supervised for 50 hours of practice driving before they drive solo.
- Keep your cool during practice sessions. Provide feedback in a respectful tone. Look for opportunities for positive reinforcement.
- Introduce privileges gradually. Allow independent driving only after much practice and for limited amounts of time in low-traffic situations. Allow longer sessions on busier roads, night driving, driving in inclement weather, and with passengers only after a driver demonstrates safe operation for several months, in accordance with the GDL restrictions in your state.



## DRIVING IS ONLY PART OF BEING A DRIVER

- Plan ahead for challenges you are likely to face. A parent-teen driving contract is a good line of defense against compromising on safety on special occasions such as proms, holidays, or school trips.
- Take a refresher course yourself so that any coaching you deliver will reinforce, not contradict, instruction from your teen's driving instructor. A refresher course sends a powerful message that skills should be assessed and improved throughout a driving career.
- Attend a parents' night class at your child's driver training facility.
- Work through your community association to have a meeting for parents and talk about the limits you've placed on your teen's driving.
- Talk to adult leaders of groups your teen is involved in — sports teams, school band, church youth group, after school clubs, etc. — about setting up a meeting for parents.
- Ask community groups and businesses that employ a large number of teens to facilitate conversation about teen driving.
- Review your state's laws about the graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws. For more information on GDL visit [AAA.com/PublicAffairs](http://AAA.com/PublicAffairs).

**T**eens need to understand that driving connects them to the community in new ways. As drivers, they will take on new legal and financial responsibilities. As the operators of a vehicle, they also must maintain that vehicle to ensure safe operation.

Involve your teen in the entire range of activities related to his or her new status, including:

- obtaining and renewing the vehicle title, registration, and license plates;
- performing routine maintenance, periodic checks, and responding to safety recalls;
- shopping for insurance, finding discounts, securing coverage;
- researching requirements related to vehicle inspections and parking fees.

Your family should discuss all expectations related to operating a vehicle. That includes financial decisions, such as who will pay for:

- gasoline?
- insurance premiums?
- car repairs?
- parking decals?
- associate membership in AAA?



## CHOOSING THE SAFEST CAR FOR A NEW DRIVER

**B**ombarded with advertising, it's tempting to choose a vehicle based on image over safety.

Whether you're buying or helping your teen buy a vehicle or if they are buying one on their own, insist on a safe choice. It's important that everyone is involved when making decisions about the vehicle.

When buying a vehicle, the insurance industry suggests you choose a late-model car. While an older car may seem bigger, heavier and therefore safer, a newer sedan probably features improved crumple zones, three-point seatbelts, and front and side airbags.

AAA has an online resource called AAA Automaker™. A simple questionnaire guides you to the make and model of the car, truck, or SUV that best meets your needs. This resource also provides manufacturers' suggested retail prices.

Here are some shopping pointers that can narrow your choices:

- Think big. Small cars are cute and may save on gas, but they can be harder to see on the road and may offer less crash protection.
- Driver education is even more critical if your



teen will be operating a large, heavy sport utility vehicle. Special skills are required to safely operate sport utility vehicles, pick-up trucks, or vans. A high center of gravity makes these vehicles less stable and more likely to roll over.

- Sports cars may attract admiring glances — but they can raise your insurance premiums.
- Check the reliability and cost of ownership data on any vehicle that makes your short list.
- Check crash test data for any vehicle you consider online at [AAA.com](http://AAA.com).
- Check the history on a used car online at [AAA.com](http://AAA.com). AAA members receive a discount on these reports.
- If you select a used car, schedule an inspection by the nearest AAA Approved Repair Facility. You can locate approved facilities online at [AAA.com](http://AAA.com).
- Look for a vehicle with a warranty or purchase an extended warranty.



## A LITTLE HOMEWORK CAN STEER YOU TO THE RIGHT DRIVER TRAINING

Even parents who have the time and temperament to teach their teens to drive should consider the added benefits of training by an expert. Driver training is important. You may be an exceptional driver but not the best teacher — either because your competence is so ingrained it has become unconscious, or because you are more likely to overreact to your own children.

Professional instructors have been trained to provide comprehensive training that addresses the mistakes new drivers are most likely to make. Even parents who are exceptional drivers should consider professional training by an expert.

Driver training is only the beginning. Your teen will still lack the experience — and perhaps the maturity — needed to be a safe driver immediately. Like anything else, your teen needs practice to become an informed, safe driver.

The extent of driver education offered through high schools is highly variable. Budget cuts and liability issues have limited the amount of hands-on experience a student receives. In some areas, no on-the-road experience is provided.

Training at a commercial driver training school may be a worthwhile investment. The key is finding a school that meets your needs. To make this process easier, AAA offers a brochure titled “Choosing a Driving School.”

Check with your local AAA club for references.



Any school that displays the AAA logo has been thoroughly reviewed and must maintain:

- late-model, safe driver training cars;
- up-to-date training materials;
- professionally trained instructors;
- a record of good business practices;
- discounts to AAA members.

Here are some pointers that will help your family identify the best training program in your area:

- Visit each facility and observe the instructors and check out the vehicles and training materials.
- Ensure the facility is fully licensed and meets all state instructional standards.
- Ask for a list of references so you can get a customer’s point of view.
- Consult your local Better Business Bureau to find out if there are complaints about the facility.
- Check on policies for refunds, make-up sessions, and contracts.
- Avoid “quickie” courses. Look for a balance of classroom and in-car instruction. A minimum of 30 classroom hours and six hours of behind-the-wheel instruction over four to six weeks are recommended.
- AAA recommends at least 50 additional hours of behind-the-wheel practice with a licensed driver before the teen applies for a license.

***Please see the brochure titled [Driving Contracts](#) or visit [AAA.com/drivingcontracts](#) to download a printable version of the Parent-Teen Driving Agreement and the Family-to-Family Agreement. Please note that these agreements may be customized to fit your needs. You may choose to use the agreements as is, or only choose sections that you feel comfortable in implementing.***

## PUT TOGETHER YOUR NEW DRIVER TOOLKIT

A variety of resources is available to help reinforce good driving habits. Here are a few to consider:

### Teaching Your Teens to Drive

This DVD and handbook from AAA guides you through 13 on-the-road exercises that help combat the most frequent causes of motor vehicle crashes. Topics including visual search habits, freeway and night driving, maintaining control on slippery surfaces and strategies to reduce risk support parents in completing supervised driving requirements. Contact your local club or call toll-free 1-800-327-3444.

### Driver-ZED

This computer-based training program is available from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. It involves teens in realistic driving simulations and provides immediate feedback on their choices.

### Driving Contracts

As a parent, you can add protective guidelines through a Parent-Teen Driving Agreement. These agreements can help communicate that driving is a privilege that your family takes seriously. Families also are joining forces by creating voluntary Family-to-Family Agreements that define acceptable driving behavior. AAA encourages parents to talk with one another about the driving rules in their respective homes and encourages them to develop some common rules.

## NAVIGATING THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY

Most teens are very Internet savvy — make them responsible for fact-finding. Below are some helpful resources to get you started.

For Information on These Topics ▶▶▶	Check These Web Resources
Driver Education and Licensing Approved Driving Schools Car Care Clinics Graduated Licensing Car Buying Costs of Vehicle Ownership Vehicle History Reports Crashworthiness Evaluations Car Insurance Car Loans Approved Auto Repair Facilities Maintenance Recordkeeping	AAA <a href="http://AAA.com">AAA.com</a>
Auto Insurance Information	Insurance Information Institute <a href="http://www.iii.org">www.iii.org</a>
Ranking of Most Frequently Stolen Vehicles	National Insurance Crime Bureau <a href="http://www.nicb.org">www.nicb.org</a>
Crash Test Results, Rollover Rates	National Highway Traffic Defects and Recalls Safety Administration (NHTSA) <a href="http://www.nhtsa.gov">www.nhtsa.gov</a>
Department of Motor Vehicle Guide for Your State	National DMV Guide <a href="http://www.dmv.org">www.dmv.org</a>
State-by-State Provisions for Teen Drivers	AAA <a href="http://AAA.com/PublicAffairs">AAA.com/PublicAffairs</a>
Driving Safety Research	AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety <a href="http://AAAfoundation.org">AAAfoundation.org</a>

**Making sure teens become  
safe, knowledgeable drivers  
takes time and patience.**



AAA's Teaching Your Teens to Drive is there to help  
with a colorfully illustrated handbook and  
live-action 60-minute DVD.

For more information, contact your local AAA club  
or call 800-327-3444, stock number 3512.



Traffic Safety Programs  
1000 AAA Drive  
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