

Great Parent Tips

Teaching your teen how to drive takes patience and your full attention. If either of you are tired, angry, distracted or not feeling well, it's best to postpone the driving lesson. Practice when you are both alert and ready to pay attention to each other.

Follow these tips to make driving time with your teen positive and productive:

- Set a good example when you drive. Obey all traffic laws and drive courteously. Wear your safety belt and make sure all other passengers also are wearing theirs.
- Be enthusiastic. Most teens are excited about getting their driver's license. Don't make the learning experience seem like a chore.
- Provide a safe vehicle for practice sessions.
- Take your teenager for driving practice under various seasonal conditions and practice different skills.
- Be a careful and supportive teacher. Your new driver will make mistakes along the way. Keep the learning experience manageable and positive for your teen.
- Use positive reinforcement. When your teen is doing well, let him/her know. When he/she makes a mistake, use it as a chance to teach, not punish.
- Sit so your left hand can be placed on the steering wheel to help guide the new driver if necessary.
- Give directions well in advance. First direct where, then state the action to take (e.g., "At the second intersection turn left"). Check traffic conditions on all sides yourself.
- Avoid the use of terms with possible double meaning (e.g., say "that is correct" instead of "that is right").
- For each new maneuver, guide the new driver through two or three practice trials, then allow the teen to practice without specific assistance or direction.
- Move to a safe place and park for lengthy discussions or performance reviews.
- Never place yourself or other drivers in dangerous situations. Do not attempt to practice a skill unless you and your teen are comfortable that it can be completed safely.
- Inform your teen what to do in case of an accident (i.e., call police, exchange insurance information).
- Take your teenager to get a driver's license only when you and your teenager feel the time is right.

Before You Turn the Key

Choose a mid-size or full-size car with an automatic transmission for your teen to practice driving. Avoid small cars, if possible. Small cars do not afford as much protection in a crash. Sports cars and muscle cars may encourage speeding. New drivers should not be overwhelmed by their vehicle. Driving mistakes in areas such as steering and braking are only magnified in a vehicle that is too large, too powerful or has large blind spots.

Before you begin a practice session:

- Check around the car. Make sure the tires have sufficient air and all lights and signals are working.
- Check the owner's manual for details on your car's controls, their locations on the dashboard and operations.
- Check the ventilation before you start driving. Adjust the heating, cooling or airflow as necessary to make you comfortable.

Practice Commentary Driving

Commentary driving is the practice of verbally calling out each step needed to complete a maneuver. Commentary driving may be awkward at first, but it is the most valuable tool you have for checking your teen's progress. Read the traffic picture aloud. Describe anything that may affect your path of travel. For example, when approaching a red light say, "red light ahead, check mirrors, ease off accelerator, apply brake." Take this guide along and use the lists of steps under each skill as a guide. Your teen should practice commentary driving from the passenger seat before actual driving lessons begin. Also, have your teen begin to judge traffic signals and stopping distances as a passenger. He/she should call out points where it would be safe to stop if the light were to turn yellow and at what point it would be safer to proceed through the intersection. When driving, a parent can call out steps while demonstrating a skill. Student drivers should begin commentary as they become comfortable with a skill.