

# BECOMING THE NEW DRIVER IN YOUR FAMILY



# START SMART

**B**ecoming a driver brings independence but also more responsibility. This guide will help you make good decisions about every aspect of operating and maintaining a vehicle. You'll find information and resources that will help you deal with the new challenges ahead of you, including:



- understanding how your role as a driver affects your family;
- recognizing the potential legal and financial impact of your decisions behind the wheel;
- finding the driving school that's right for you;
- benefiting from your parents' experience;
- protecting yourself and your passengers;
- choosing the vehicle that's right for you;

- getting the best deal on insurance;
- maintaining a safe vehicle;
- preventing family conflict with a Parent-Teen Driving Agreement.

## TAKE THE KEYS, ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES

**M**ost of us take driving for granted. But driving is not a right. It's a privilege initially granted by your parents and eventually licensed by the state. You'll enjoy more independence but you also will be connected to your community in a new way, and the choices you make as a driver have major consequences.

Years as a passenger do not give anyone the skill, knowledge, or experience to be a safe driver without additional effort. Your family has a responsibility to prepare you for this privilege. In fact, recent studies find that teens demonstrate the safest driving behavior when parents remain involved for at least the first year.

Your preparation to drive should include:

- driver education at school, from a driving school, or by an experienced driver;
- practice sessions with an experienced driver, such as a parent;
- practice in varying conditions, roadways and times of day;
- a family agreement about mutual expectations and the conditions under which you are allowed to drive.

Your parents' responsibility to oversee your driving doesn't end when you get your license. Full driving privileges must be *earned*. As a driver, you must continue to build your skills so you make the right decisions under widely varying conditions.

Driving is a privilege you can earn — and one you can lose.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for American teenagers. A commitment to increasing your knowledge and skills will go a long way toward protecting you.

## DRIVING IS ONLY PART OF BEING A DRIVER

**D**riving entails more than getting from Point A to Point B. As a driver, you also are responsible for:

- safeguarding others — including passengers, pedestrians, other motorists, and cyclists;
- demonstrating basic knowledge of your state's traffic laws;
- obtaining and renewing title, registration, and license plates;
- securing insurance coverage;
- performing routine maintenance, periodic checks, and responding to safety recalls.

You also may be responsible for state vehicle inspections and parking fees or decals.

You may also need to educate your parents. For instance, if they expect you to become the family chauffeur, you may need to point out if graduated licensing laws will restrict you from having passengers until you gain more experience. These laws also will dictate conditions under which you can drive until you demonstrate collision-free driving for a specified amount of time.

As a minor, you may be used to thinking that your parents bear all of the financial and legal responsibility for your behavior. That begins to change as you become a driver. You will be penalized for violating traffic laws. You can be held responsible for damaging property. You face the consequences for a crash that injures or kills another person.

*You're not alone behind the wheel — what you do as a new driver has consequences for your entire family.*

## A LITTLE HOMEWORK WILL STEER YOU TO THE RIGHT DRIVER EDUCATION

**A**AAA recommends that you complete at least 50 hours of practice driving with a licensed driver before you apply for a license. Also, many graduated licensing laws stipulate 50 hours of supervised practice before applying for a license as well. This practice can be done with parents or a licensed driving instructor.

You have already learned a lot about driving by observing your parents over the years. You may not be aware of it, but you've probably picked up some of their habits — good and bad. Even parents who are very skilled and safety-conscious may not have the time and temperament to be the best teacher for you.

That's why it makes sense to have *other* adults assess your driving. A commercial driving school may be a wise investment. Some insurance companies even offer additional discounts to new drivers who complete approved training programs.

Driving schools employ professionals with comprehensive training and the experience to spot and correct the mistakes new drivers are most likely to make. Finding the right driving school takes a little time and effort.

Researching available resources is one of the first things you can do to demonstrate to your parents that you take your safety seriously. To make this process easier, AAA offers a brochure titled "Choosing a Driving School."



AAA can help. Any school that displays the AAA symbol 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.

## CHOOSE A SAFE VEHICLE

**Y***You want a sports car... or a truck... or an SUV. Shiny. Powerful. Great sound system.*

It's hard not to consider a car as the ultimate toy. We're bombarded with advertising that tells us that what we drive defines us. The truth is, what we drive protects us, and as a new driver, you need to be protected more than you need to make a statement.

Whether you're buying the car yourself or if your parents are helping, here's some information everyone can appreciate: the insurance industry suggests later-model cars are a better choice. Newer sedans have the improved crumple zones, three-point seatbelts, and front and side airbags that provide the greatest protection.

A little online investigation can help you identify a vehicle that your parents will appreciate from a safety standpoint, and you will be happy driving. AAA Automaker™ is a simple questionnaire that guides you to the make and model of car, truck, or SUV that best meets your needs. This resource also provides manufacturers' suggested retail prices. Also log on to [www.AAA.com](http://www.AAA.com) to find crash-test data for any vehicle, to check the history of a used car and to schedule an inspection of any used car.

## THE CARE AND FEEDING OF THE FAMILY CAR

**V** You've been around cars your entire life, so it's easy to overlook that they are complex machines. To prolong the life of the vehicle and protect your own life, it's important that you get in the habit of performing routine safety checks before hitting the road.

You should feel confident in your ability to:

- use a tire gauge to check tire pressure;
- check fluid levels;
- change a tire;
- use jumper cables.

If you need help developing these skills, look for a car care clinic in your community. Your AAA club may host clinics with experts who can help you learn to perform these basics.

## MORE THAN MECHANICS: THE PERSONAL SIDE OF DRIVING

**V** Your personality is reflected in your driving. How you manage frustration, stress, time pressures, surprises, and fatigue all have an effect on your driving.

For teens, peer pressure also is a huge influence. You will never be more susceptible to peer pressure than you are now, and the combination of driving and peer pressure can put you in real danger.

- You may only drink and get behind the wheel once...
- Use drugs and then drive once...
- Drive when you're really exhausted once...

But once is all it takes to change, or even end, your life or the lives of others.

Even if you are not impaired by a substance, distractions and emotions can pose risks. Leading distractions to drivers include taking eyes off the road to play a CD; eating and drinking while driving; performing personal grooming; becoming engaged in an intense conversation (with passengers and on cell phones); consulting a map; looking at passengers; or rearranging or reaching for personal belongings.

Road rage makes for a catchy headline, but the risk is real. If you have a quick temper, learning to control your impulses is critically important for you. Keep your cool. Practice consistent courtesy to others. If other drivers become upset with you, don't escalate the situation.

There are times when friends are going to encourage you to take unnecessary risks. They may seem like small things — skipping the safety belt or driving a little faster. It's hard to say no. But when you have the car, you are in charge, guided by the Parent-Teen Agreement. In fact, some teens say this family contract gives them an easy out, because they can explain they are not willing to face the consequences of what friends want them to do.



## 10 COMMON BEHAVIORS BY TEEN DRIVERS

1. **Bad habits.** Does Mom or Dad have a driving habit that drives you nuts? Check yourself... New drivers pick up good and bad habits from parents.
2. **Following too closely.** Is that guy tailgating you? Chances are it's another teen driver.
3. **Speeding.** You may have keener hand-eye coordination and reflexes than your parents, but inexperience in "reading the road" makes speeding your quickest route to a crash.
4. **Safety belts.** If you think wearing safety belts makes you look uncool, consider: How will you look in a body cast?
5. **Driving while impaired.** Drinking and driving don't mix. Impaired performance and inexperience is a deadly combination. (The same is true for other drugs, even some prescription drugs.)
6. **Passengers.** Company can cause misery. Teens are more likely to overload a car with too many passengers, leading to higher fatalities in a crash.
7. **Driving while distracted.** When your attention wanders behind the wheel, the consequences can be painful, personally and financially. Intense conversations, eating and drinking, reading, and personal grooming are all better done out of the car — or at least when it's parked.

8. **Aggressive driving and road rage.** Strong emotion in motion can be risky. Driving while angry or upset clouds your judgment and increases your risk.
9. **Poor scanning.** You would never drive blind, but failure to check blind spots before changing lanes is a big risk too.
10. **Poor distance judgment.** In earning your license you've come a long way...but as a new driver you need to gain experience in gauging distance so you allow enough time to merge, exit, and cross traffic safely.





## NAVIGATING THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY

The more you can be a source of information to your parents, the more respect they will gain for your emerging maturity. Do the fact-finding related to your responsibilities as a driver. Below are some reliable resources you should find helpful.

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://www.AAA.com">www.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://www.AAA.com/publicaffairs">www.AAA.com/publicaffairs</a>
Driving Safety Research	AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety <a href="http://www.aaafoundation.org">www.aaafoundation.org</a>

## STOCKING YOUR FAMILY'S NEW DRIVER TOOLKIT

Educational materials and safety resources are a good investment. Below are some tools 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. The program covers vehicle control; positioning and speed adjustment; passing and off-road maneuvers; visual search habits; freeway and night driving; maintaining control on slippery surfaces; and strategies to reduce risk. For more information 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 immerses you in realistic driving simulations and provides immediate feedback on your responses.

## SPELL IT OUT:

### CREATE A PARENT-TEEN DRIVING AGREEMENT

Your state's graduated licensing laws put restrictions on your driving. As you gain experience and remain collision-free, you gain additional rights.

Your parents also have a say in how you exercise your new privileges. They have an obligation to protect you — from your lack of experience, your impulses, and your vulnerability to peer pressure.

A Parent-Teen Driving Agreement can help put these protections in place and prevent family fights that occur when expectations and assumptions collide. By spelling out a contract, both parents and teens gain a clear understanding of commitment and consequences.

It's important to review and sign a contract BEFORE you are allowed to drive solo.

Look over this sample contract and then share it with your parents. Give them time to go over it and then schedule a family discussion. Both you and your parents sign off on the terms of the contract — which means you share an understanding of acceptable driving behavior.

Note that through this contract, your parents also are making commitments to support you in

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your goal of becoming a safe and responsible driver. For example, they will agree to pick you up — without lectures — if for some reason you feel it is unsafe for you to drive or be a passenger of another driver.

It's a good idea to also schedule a review date in six months or so. As you demonstrate good driving habits and mature judgment, your parents may be willing to broaden your privileges.



*For more information, please see the brochure titled Driving Contracts or visit [www.AAA.com/drivingcontracts](http://www.AAA.com/drivingcontracts) to download a printable version.*







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