

PASSENGER'S ED FOR PARENTS

Many parents worry about the risks teens face as new drivers but how about as passengers? More than half of teens who die in car crashes are not behind the wheel and teens' chances of getting in a fatal wreck rise sharply if they ride with a teen driver.

Teen passengers can lower this risk by riding like a friend: limiting distractions, respecting the driver, and always wearing a seat belt. Here are six quick tips for teaching your teen "passenger's ed":

1. Talk about how to be a safe passenger, beginning at age 12. Distractions are a major cause of crashes, and passenger distractions are particularly dangerous for new drivers. Discuss helpful passenger behaviors, such as reading directions when asked and respecting your driver by not talking loudly, chatting on cell phones, playing loud music, or acting wild.
2. Insist on seat belts. Most adolescent and teen passengers who die in wrecks are not wearing seat belts. Tell your teens that by buckling up they help protect their friends' lives, as well as their own. In a crash, an unrestrained body can hurt others in the car.
3. Don't let your child ride with a driver who has less than a year's experience. Most teen crashes are the result of "rookie" mistakes. Even the most mature teen needs time to gain driving experience.
4. Monitor your child's travel. Teens driving without a fixed destination are at a higher risk of getting into a crash. Find out where your teen is going, how he or she will get there, who will be there, and when your teen will be home.
5. Create a code word. Help your teen get out of unsafe situations by calling or texting you with a previously agreed-upon code word that signals trouble. When you hear or see the word, pick your child up right away.
6. Set a good example. Your child is watching you. Don't talk on the cell phone or text while behind the wheel. Obey the speed limit. Don't drink and drive. Always wear your seat belt.

Learn more about teen driver safety at chop.edu/youngdrivers.