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Be Empowered! Parents Hold the Keys to Teen Driving Success

**Talk to Your Teen about the Importance of Driving Safely
During National Teen Driver Safety Week**

October 19, 2020, Medina, Ohio — Parenting is no easy task, and parenting teenagers comes with its own unique set of challenges. During National Teen Driver Safety Week October 19-24, the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is teaming up with the Medina County Safe Communities Coalition to help empower parents to discuss the importance of driving safety with their young drivers. The week is a perfect time to begin — and continue — this conversation, and to remind parents not to hand over the car keys until their teen knows the rules of the road.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for teens 15 to 18 years old in the United States. In 2018, there were 2,121 people killed in crashes involving a teen passenger vehicle driver (15-18 years old), of which 719 deaths were the teen driver — a 5% decrease from 2017. In fact, in 2018, there were an estimated 88,000 teen drivers injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes, and an estimated 256,000 people injured in crashes involving a teen driver, accounting for almost 10% of all those injured that year.

“We want our parents of teen drivers to understand the vital role they play in communicating important driving safety information,” said Jessica Miles, Safe Communities Project Director. “Teens lack experience behind the wheel, and that increases the chance for dangerous circumstances for the teen drivers and others around them,” Miles said. “This is why it's so important for parents to have these discussions with their teens. Don't be afraid to have this conversation every day. NHTSA offers parents and caregivers helpful tips and a framework to talk to their teen drivers about risky driving behaviors that can lead to fatal consequences.”

Parents play an important role in helping ensure their teen drivers take smart steps to stay safe on the road. NHTSA gives parents tips on how to talk about safe driving behaviors with their teens, and to address the most dangerous and deadly driving behaviors for teen drivers: alcohol, lack of seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, and driving with passengers.

NHTSA's website has detailed information and statistics on teen driving, and outlines the basic rules parents can use to help reduce the risks for teen drivers:

1. **Impaired Driving:** All teens are too young to legally buy, possess, or consume alcohol. However, nationally, 16% of teen drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2018 had alcohol in their system. But alcohol isn't the only substance that can keep your teen from driving safely: Like other drugs, marijuana affects a driver's ability to react to their surroundings. Driving is a complex task, and marijuana slows reaction time, affecting a driver's ability to drive safely. Remind your teen that driving under the influence of any impairing substance — including illicit or prescription drugs, or over-the-counter medication — could have deadly consequences.
2. **Seat Belt Safety:** Wearing a seat belt is one of the simplest ways for teens to stay safe in a vehicle. Yet too many teens aren't buckling up. In 2018, almost half (45%) of the teen passenger vehicle drivers who died were unbuckled. Even more troubling, when the teen driver involved in the fatal crash was

unbuckled, nine out of 10 of the passengers who died were also unbuckled. Remind your teen that it's important to buckle up on every trip, every time, no matter what — front seat and back.

3. **Distracted Driving:** Cell phone use while driving is more than just risky — it can be deadly, and is outlawed in 47 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Remind your teen about the dangers of texting and using a phone while driving. Distracted driving isn't limited to cell phone use; other passengers, audio and climate controls in the vehicle, and eating or drinking while driving are all examples of dangerous distractions for teen drivers. In 2018, among teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes, 10% were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. Also remind your teen that headphones are not appropriate to wear while driving a vehicle, as they can distract a driver from hearing sirens, horns, or other important sounds.
4. **Speed Limits:** Speeding is a critical issue for all drivers, especially for teens. In 2018, more than one-quarter (28%) of all teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes were speeding at the time of the crash, and males were more likely to be involved in fatal speeding-related crashes than females. Remind your teen to always drive within the speed limit.
5. **Passengers:** Passengers in a teen's car can lead to disastrous consequences. Research shows that the risk of a fatal crash goes up dramatically in direct relation to the number of passengers in a car. The likelihood of teen drivers engaging in risky behavior triples when traveling with multiple passengers.

Parents can help protect their teen drivers by talking with them about these risks. Self-reported surveys show that teens whose parents set firm rules for driving typically engage in less risky driving behaviors and are involved in fewer crashes.

Explaining the rules and any other restrictions outlined in Ohio's graduated driver licensing ([GDL law](#)) and the deadly consequences of unsafe driving practices can help encourage teens to exhibit safe driving behaviors.

“Teens will learn much of this content in drivers' education classes, but it's their home environment that will really help these lessons and rules stick. We need parents to set these rules before handing over the car keys,” Miles said. “We hope parents will start the conversation about safe driving during National Teen Driver Safety Week, but then continue the conversations — every day throughout the year — to help keep their teens safe behind the wheel.”

For more information about National Teen Driver Safety Week and to learn safe driving tips to share with your teens, visit www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving.

The Medina County Safe Communities Coalition is a collaboration of law enforcement, healthcare providers, fire departments, school districts, the media, and local businesses. Our mission is to save lives and reduce injuries on Medina County roads and highways. For more information, please call 330-723-9688, option 2.

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