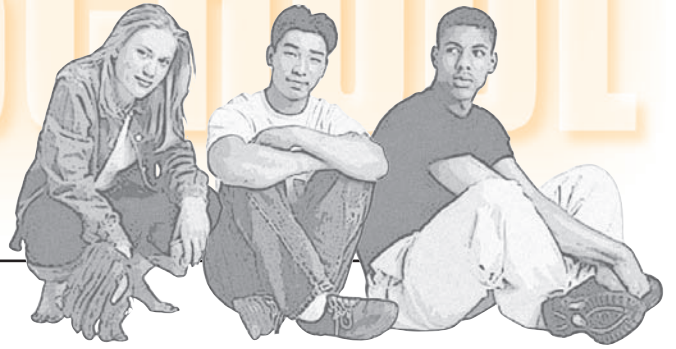


# HIGH SCHOOL PARENT



## Teens behind the wheel— staying ahead of the curve

**A**sk a 15-year old in New York how long it will be before he or she can drive and don't be surprised if the answer comes back measured in weeks, days, and even hours. Few teens can disguise their excitement at the prospect of driving. In our car-dependent society, a driver license is a rite of passage, a symbol of adulthood. Little changes a teen's life as suddenly and as profoundly as a driver license.

### Learning to drive is a good thing

With all of the negative news concerning teen drivers, parents may be tempted to look solely at the risks associated with driving—but, driving is not all bad. Having an extra driver in a household can lessen the hassle of chauffeuring kids to and from after-school activities. And face it, it can be handy to send your teen to the store to pick up those few extra things you need for dinner. Learning to drive is the natural course of things for almost anyone who lives in a rural or suburban community. Most parents learned to drive (and survived), and their children can learn to do the same.

### Don't minimize responsibility

Too often, the evening news recounts the tragic tale of teens involved in a fatal car accident. Inexperience behind the wheel and a willingness to take chances is a dangerous combination. Toss in drugs or alcohol and it suddenly creates an even deadlier concoction.

The facts concerning teen driving are sobering. Even though nearly nine out of 10 teens describe themselves as safe drivers, motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death among young drivers. In fact, drivers age 15-20 are twice as likely to die in a fatal auto accident than other drivers. When teens slip behind the wheel, they must understand that they are responsible for the welfare of both their passengers and occupants of other cars on the highway.

### The \$\$\$ of driving

A new driver adds a considerable expense to the family budget. Will the new driver compete to use the family car, or will you need to purchase another vehicle? Will your teen contribute toward the purchase, maintenance, or operation of the car? Do those new costs mean your teen may have to sacrifice sports or other school activities for a part-time job? Beware that a car

can become a huge time and financial obligation. More than one student have seen their grades or social lives suffer.

### A parent's role

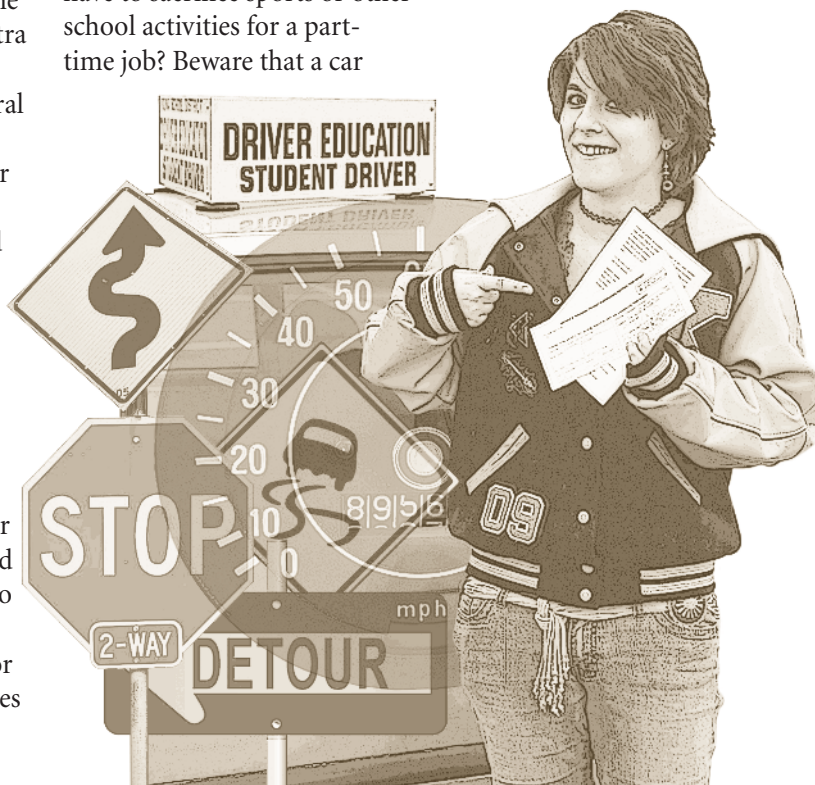
As a parent, you will play an active role in the driving process. New York law requires your written consent for your 16-year old to apply for a driving permit or license. Minors cannot enter into legal contracts such as loans, vehicle purchases, or insurance, etc. without your consent. And of course, your child is a precious commodity. With so much at stake, you will want to be involved. Consider the following:

- ▶ **Plan ahead.** Establish your ground rules for getting a license, using the car, etc. before your child asks to take the permit test.
- ▶ **Know the law.** That includes both the rules of the

road and the legal restrictions on new drivers.

- ▶ **Refresh your own driving skills.** Most teens will learn to drive from their parents. Before you take on the role of driving instructor, make certain your driving practices are up to snuff.
- ▶ **Have your child take Driver Education if offered in your school.** Driver Ed courses provide students with class time to learn about driving safety and then gives them practice time on the road. If your school does not offer Driver Ed, consider a driver instruction school. In all cases, your child must take and pass a state-certified pre-licensing course (frequently referred to as a five-hour course) to apply for a license.
- ▶ **Emphasize safety.** Driving is a privilege that brings new freedom, but with the freedom comes new responsibility. A single lapse in attention or judgment can have irreversible and tragic consequences.

Looking for more information? You can find New York State driving regulations, manuals, driver permits and licenses, and much more on the Department of Motor Vehicle Web site section for new drivers at [www.nydmv.state.ny.us/license.htm#newdrivers](http://www.nydmv.state.ny.us/license.htm#newdrivers). Most of their online material is also available in printed form at your local DMV office. The Governors Highway Safety Council and Ford have a great Web site filled with safe-driving tips at [www.drivingskillsforlife.com](http://www.drivingskillsforlife.com).



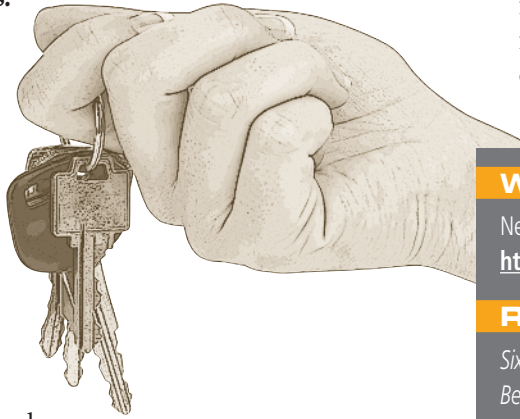


## Helping your teens hit the road safely

Helping your teen grow into a safe and responsible driver takes understanding, involvement and firm limits.

Here are some suggestions:

- ☀ **Take an active role in helping your teenager learn to drive.** Supplement driver education with practice sessions in a wide variety of situations, such as driving at night, in heavy traffic or on the highway. Supervised practice should be spread over at least six months and continue even after a teen graduates from a learner's permit to a restricted or full license. One family agonized when their teen received her learner permit in the dead of winter. Eventually they came to believe that all the supervised practice of driving on ice and parallel parking next to snow banks put her in better stead over the long run.
- ☀ **Remember, you are a role model.** New drivers learn a lot by example, so practice safe driving.
- ☀ **Emphasize the importance of safety belts.** Though you can't buckle your teenagers in or be sure they'll keep them on once they leave the driveway, you can require seat belt use when you are riding together in the car. Make sure you wear yours, too. Hopefully it will become a habit that sticks.
- ☀ **Prohibit driving and drinking.** While alcohol isn't a factor in most crashes of 16-year-old drivers, even small amounts of alcohol can impair teens. Many families adopt an "anytime, anyplace" policy, which means that regardless of time or distance, a teen who feels he or she shouldn't drive can call home for a ride.
- ☀ **Limit night driving.** The problem isn't just that night driving requires more skill. Outings at night tend to be recreational. In these circumstances, even teens who usually follow the rules can be easily distracted or encouraged to take risks.
- ☀ **Restrict passengers.** Teen passengers in a vehicle can distract a beginning driver and may lead to greater risk-taking. Almost two of every three teen passenger deaths occur in crashes when another teen is driving. The best policy is to restrict teen passengers to no more than one.
- ☀ **Help your teen choose and maintain a safe vehicle.** Small cars do not offer the best crash protection, sporty cars may



encourage speeding, and trucks and small SUVs are more prone to roll over. When it comes to cars, teens often focus on appearance—the kickin' sound system, chrome hubs and tinted windows—but neglect to make sure their windshield wipers work or their brakes are safe.

- ☀ **Start 'em out young.** Even before your child is eligible for a learner's permit, you can teach about safe driving every time you ride together. Talk about what traffic signs mean, describe why you are slowing down for a bridge (i.e. bridge surfaces freeze before road surfaces), or explain why you are stopping for a school bus or emergency vehicle. They're a captive audience when you're the driver—take the opportunity to teach.

**WEB LINK:**

New drivers—How to apply for a license under current laws:  
<http://www.nysdmv.com/license.htm#newdrivers>

**READING:**

*Sixteen is Too Young To Drive: Taking Control When Your Teen's Behind-the-Wheel* by Donna R. and Richard M. Crossman

**DRIVER EDUCATION:**

The New York State Police offers comprehensive defensive driving courses for new drivers. For more information, contact the traffic section of your local state police headquarters.

## HIGH SCHOOL OFFERS on-line DMV testing

No more traveling to the Department of Motor Vehicles and waiting in line to take the learner's permit drivers test any more. Colonie Central High has joined other schools in offering the test online during the school day.



or study hall to take the learner's permit exam. A CCHS staff member serves as the test proctor—verifying credentials, forms and setting up accounts.

DMV has implemented the Online Knowledge Testing Program in schools in the hopes of making the testing process less time consuming for everyone. CCHS students ages 15 and older, who obtain written parental permission, can report to the computer lab during their lunch period

The system automatically scores each test and displays the results for the student on the computer screen. Students who pass the exam are then given a printed receipt from the lab. The receipt can be taken to any New York State DMV office, where the test-taker will receive his or her permit, provided they are age 16 or older.