

## **TALK TO YOUR TEENS ABOUT DRIVING – THEY ARE LISTENING!**

### **National Teen Driver Safety Week is October 18-24, 2015**

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 14-to-18 year olds in the U.S. In fact, in 2013, there were 2,614 teen (15-to-19 year old) passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes, where an estimated 130,000 were injured. Yet, a recent survey shows that only 25 percent of parents have had a serious talk with their kids about the key components of driving. Parents need to take the time to talk with their kids about the many dangers of driving, which includes alcohol, seat belts, texting, speeding, and extra passengers.

This year's campaign, "5 to Drive," is putting an emphasis on parents talking to their teens about the risks they face while driving. Research shows that parents play an important role in increasing their teen's driving skills, as they have the greatest influence over their teen's behavior. In fact, leading experts believe parents play a key role in preventing teen car crashes and deaths. Teens with parents who set rules, monitor their driving, and are supportive, are half as likely to crash and twice as likely to use seat belts as teens with less involved parents. Parents can help by talking with their teens about safe driving practices.

The education and awareness campaign identifies the five most important rules all teen drivers need to follow. Parents need to start talking to their teens about the 5 to Drive, and make certain teens understand these rules before they hit the road:

1. **No Drinking and Driving.** Compared with other age groups, teen drivers are at a greater risk of death in alcohol-related crashes, even though they're too young to legally buy or possess alcohol. Nationally in 2013, almost one out of five (19 percent) of the teen drivers (15-to-19 years old) who were involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.
2. **Buckle Up. Every Trip. Every Time. Front Seat and Back.** Teens are not buckling up, and neither are their passengers. In 2013, 64 percent of all the young (13-to-19 year old) passengers of teen drivers who died in motor vehicle crashes were not restrained. When the teen driver was also unrestrained, the number of all passengers unrestrained increased to almost 90 percent.
3. **Put It Down. One Text or Call Could Wreck It All.** In 2013, among teen drivers involved in fatal crashes, 6 percent were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. This age group had the highest proportion of drivers distracted by phone use. In that same year, 156 people were killed in crashes that involved a distracted teen driver.
4. **Stop Speeding Before It Stops You.** In 2013, almost one-third (29 percent) of teen drivers involved in a fatal crash were speeding.
5. **No More Than One Passenger at a Time.** Extra passengers for a teen driver can lead to disastrous results. Research shows that the risk of a fatal crash goes up in direct relation to the number of teens in a car. The likelihood of teen drivers engaging in risky behavior triples when traveling with multiple passengers.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service reminds parents to take advantage of the National Teen Driver Safety Week to talk to their teens about staying safe on the road.

Statistics show that teens are most likely to have a crash during the first six months after getting their license, which is primarily due to their inexperience. A recent study by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) reports that drivers ages 15-to-17 years old are not only at a disadvantage due to their lack of experience, but also due to the incomplete development of the prefrontal cortex of the brain — the part of the brain that helps weigh the consequences of risky behavior. According to the study's author, Russell Henk, this is the last part of the brain to develop.

TTI also reports that teens are eight times more likely to be in a fatal crash when they are carrying two or more teen passengers. The Texas Graduated Driver's License (GDL) law is designed to limit the number of teen passengers that can legally ride with a novice driver. The GDL provides parents with the controls to help keep their teen drivers safe. However, many parents are not aware of the provisions of this law, which are divided into two phases. During phase one, the teen driver must always be accompanied by a person at least 21 years of age. During phase two, teens cannot operate a motor vehicle with more than one passenger who is younger than 21-years-old, unless the additional passengers are also family members. Driving is prohibited between midnight and 5 a.m., unless the teen is driving to attend work or a school-related activity, or responding to an emergency situation. Cell phone use is also prohibited during both phases of the GDL and for all drivers under the age of 18. Making sure your teen follows the GDL law can help get a teen safely through the most critical time when driver inexperience can lead to crashes.

Spending as much time driving with your teen in many different driving situations can significantly impact your teen's future driving practices.

- Practice driving with your teen as often as possible.
- Discuss your rules of the road, and create a Parent-Teen Driving Agreement.
- Model good driving behavior for your teen by always using seat belts and never using a cell phone while driving.
- Share your rules with other parents and teens.

For more information about Teen Driver Safety Week and the "5 to Drive" campaign visit [www.safercar.gov/parents](http://www.safercar.gov/parents).

For more information contact the AgriLife Extension Office at 903-473-4580 or visit us at [rains.agrilife.org](http://rains.agrilife.org). We are also on Facebook at [Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences). Go and "Like" our page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Consumer Sciences in Rains County.