

Over 100 Safe Driving Tips for Young Drivers

By Jay Stoetzer, Family Protection Specialist

Driving Around School

- Get to school five to ten minutes early and leave five minutes late to avoid the mad dash into and out from the parking lots. Many accidents happen when kids are rushing around.
- If your school lot has perpendicular spaces (not angle parking), park in a space you can pull straight out of instead of having to back out. Backing out in crowded lots is tricky.
- Watch for kids getting on and off school buses — and don't run into the school buses, either.
- Go slow.
- Don't leave valuables like wallets, shoes, leather jackets or sports equipment in your car where they can be seen — they invite break-ins.
- Always stop for school buses with flashing lights. The flashing lights mean that students are either getting on or off the bus and may be crossing the street. Their safety depends on cars obeying this law.

Driving Around Town

- Avoid making left-hand turns across busy intersections that don't have turn signals. It takes a while to learn how to gauge oncoming traffic. Better to go down a block or two until you come to a light, or plan a route that doesn't need this turn.
- Don't make assumptions about what other drivers are going to do. The only thing you can assume about another driver with a turn signal on is that he has a turn signal on. He might not be turning at all and forgot to turn it off — or has changed his mind.
- When there's an obstruction in your lane, wait for oncoming traffic to clear before you pull around. Just because someone's blocking your lane doesn't mean you have the right of way in the next or oncoming lane.
- Watch out for aggressive drivers and try to stay out of their way. They are the cause of a lot of accidents — especially on the beltways.
- Watch out for anything connected to the U.S. Mail. (This tip was submitted by someone who has had run-ins with a mailbox, a mail delivery station wagon, and a fender bender in front of the post office.)
- Don't do anything that will cause another driver to slam on the brakes, such as pulling out in front of him or swerving into his lane.

Driving in the Country

- Watch out for deer and other large and small animals. If you see a deer approaching, slow down and flash your lights repeatedly. Often, the deer will run away.
- If you see one deer, watch out for others close by — they often travel in pairs or groups.
- Watch out for pigs, chickens, cows, and skunks, too.
- When driving in the desert, watch out for animals like camels. One reader wrote in that a relative was severely injured in an impact with a camel.

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Driving in Bad Weather

- Turn your headlights on anytime you need to turn your windshield wipers on — in rain, fog, sleet, freezing rain, or snow. It will help your visibility and help other drivers see you. (It's the law in Kansas and Missouri that you must turn your lights on whenever you need to keep your windshield wipers on.)
- In winter, keep an ice scraper with a brush in your car in case it snows or sleets. Also check that you have wiper fluid/de-icer in your car.
- Double the space you normally leave between you and the next car. You'll need more space to stop on slick roads.
- Brake gently.
- Make sure your exhaust tail pipe is clear if you've had to dig your car out of snow or ice or if you've backed into a snow bank. If your tail pipe is blocked, you could get sick or die from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- When driving on slippery surfaces like ice or snow, use gentle pressure on the accelerator pedal when starting. If your wheels start to spin, let up on the accelerator until traction returns.
- Check that your windshield washer works — you may need it in snow and sleet.
- Braking in bad weather can be tricky. When braking on wet roads: (1) if you have ABS (anti-lock) brakes, do not pump the brakes; (2) if you skid with non-ABS brakes and your wheels lock up, let up on the brakes to unlock the wheels, then brake gently.
- Listen to radio traffic reports and adjust your travel plans accordingly.
- Keep windows and windshield clear. Make sure wipers are working.
- Leave a window open a little bit to keep the windshield from fogging up and to give you fresh air.
- Watch for danger spots ahead. You've probably heard that bridges and overpasses may freeze before the roads do.
- When starting out in bad weather, test your brakes to see how far it takes you to stop. (This tip was sent in by someone who didn't do this and ended up wrecking her car. She also called her dad on his car phone to tell him about the accident — and he was so upset, he wrecked his car too. So her second tip is not to tell your parents you've wrecked the car while they are driving.)
- If you are stuck in ice or snow, try putting your floor mats under the edge of the tires to give them traction.

General Tips

- Always wear your seat belt — and make sure all passengers buckle up, too.
- Adjust your car's headrest to a height behind your head — not your neck — to minimize whiplash in case you're in an accident.
- Never try to fit more people in the car than you have seatbelts for them to use.
- Obey the speed limits. Going too fast gives you less time to stop or react. Excess speed is one of the main causes of teenage accidents.
- Don't run red lights.
- Use turn signals to indicate your intention to turn or change lanes. Turn it on to give the cars behind you enough time to react before you take the action. Also make sure the signal turns off after you've completed the action.
- When the light turns green, make sure the intersection clears before you go.
- Don't drive like you own the road; drive like you own the car.

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- Make sure your windshield is clean. At sunrise and sunset, light reflecting off a dirty windshield can momentarily blind you.
- Don't blast the radio. You might miss hearing a siren or a horn that could warn you of possible trouble.
- Make sure your garage door is completely open before backing out of it. (Submitted by a teen who learned this one from his dad's mistakes.)
- Drive into your garage straight, not on an angle. One teen thought her car would straighten out before she got inside, but instead she dented the car and broke the molding on the garage.
- Make sure your car has gas in it. Don't ride around with the gauge on empty — who knows where you might get stranded.
- Don't drink and drive, and don't ride with anyone who has been drinking. Call parents or friends to take you home if you need a ride.
- Don't take drugs or drive if you've taken any. Don't ride with anyone who has been using drugs. Even some over-the-counter drugs can make you drowsy — check the label for warnings.
- Don't drive with small children or even small teenage friends as passengers in a front seat that has a passenger-side air bag. They should be buckled up in the back seat. Studies show small children may be injured by air bags even in low-impact collisions. (Actually, it's safer not to drive with friends and kids in the car at all when you're learning to drive — they can be distracting.)
- Don't talk on the phone, put on make-up, comb your hair, or eat while driving. People who talk on phones while driving are four times more likely to have an accident. If you need to make a call, pull off the road to a safe spot and park.
- Don't fiddle with the radio while you are driving. It's better to wait until you can pull over and stop, because even taking your focus off the road for a few seconds could lead to an accident.
- Use good-quality tires and make sure they are inflated to the right pressure (check your owner's manual).
- Maintain your car. Bald tires, a slipping transmission, or a hesitant engine could lead to accidents.
- Use headlights during daylight driving, especially on long stretches of highway and rural roads, to make you more visible to oncoming drivers.
- Select a designated driver when going out with friends. This person does not drink and has the responsibility of getting people home safely. (Drinking and driving DO NOT MIX.)
- Watch out for potholes, especially after bad weather.
- Be on the lookout for motorcycles, bikes, and pedestrians.
- When driving to a new place, get complete directions before you go. Figure out what exits you need to take beforehand.

To Pass or Not to Pass — Don't Pass:

- When there is a solid yellow line on your side
- When you're uncertain there is enough time or space
- When you can't see around a curve or over a hill
- When behind multiple cars and passing one car doesn't really make any difference
- On two-lane roads, don't pass tractors or trucks or other vehicles you can't see around
- In hazardous weather conditions
- When another car is coming toward you in the opposite lane

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- When a car is passing you
- When there is construction or road work
- When the car in front of you is going the maximum speed limit
- When on narrow roads, on bridges, or in tunnels
- When you are unfamiliar with the car you are driving and its capabilities
- Don't play leap frog by passing a friend that just passed you

Passing with Caution

- Only pass if there's a dotted line on your side.
- Check that the passing lane is clear.
- Make sure you have plenty of space to pass safely.
- Signal before you pass.
- Pass at least ten miles per hour faster than the car you're passing while not exceeding the speed limit.
- Make sure you have cleared the passed car with enough space before pulling back into your lane.

Major Factors in Accidents

- Speed
- Alcohol and drugs
- Ignoring right-of-way
- Tailgating
- Improper passing and driving to the left of center
- Fatigue
- Reckless driving

Danger Signs for Fatigue

- Drowsiness can sneak up on you when you're driving. For teenagers, driving late at night — between eleven p.m. and two a.m. — is particularly dangerous for falling asleep at the wheel. Watch for these signs and do something before you run into a tree or another car:
- Yawning a lot
- Having trouble keeping eyes open
- Not being able to concentrate
- Not remembering the last few minutes or seconds
- Jerking of your head or body from the brink of falling asleep
- Car wanders from the road or into another lane

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What to Do About Fatigue

- Slow down.
- Pull off the road into a safe parking space.
- Call home if you can.
- Talk to your passenger if you have one.
- Turn the radio to a lively station; try singing.
- Roll down the window and get some fresh air for a few minutes, or turn the vent on full blast.
- Make a pit stop — use the bathroom and get a soda or coffee to drink.

Buying a Used Car

- Check used-car rating guides for listings with good and bad points of used cars.
- Check the horn, lights, heat, air-conditioning, brakes, seat belts, steering, and seats before you buy. Also look for evidence that indicates the car was in a major accident.
- Check with the previous owner for the car's accident and maintenance record. For a fee, you may be able to get information from your state department of motor vehicles with the vehicle identification number, which can tell you if the car has been in previous accidents.
- Have a mechanic you trust go over the car and alert you to any potential problems.
- Check the car for evidence of tampering, like marks on the odometer or numbers that don't line up. Also see if the odometer miles are more than the mileage entered on oil stickers, inspection stickers, or tire warranty cards.
- Look at the tires. If the odometer reads less than 25,000 miles, the car should have the original tires — and they should all be the same brand.

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