



[The Dangers of Late-Night Teen Driving](#)

by [John Demas](#) on 12/08/09 at 5:11 pm

Overview

Far too many teens keep dying in nighttime car accidents. In fact, sixteen-year-old night drivers are twice as likely to die in fatal car crashes than their peers driving only during the day. Car accidents remain the “leading cause of death among American teens, [causing] more than one-third of all deaths of 16 to 18 year olds.” In 2005, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that almost thirty-five hundred (3,500) 15-to 20-year-old drivers [died that year] and an additional 281,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.”

Hardly a month goes by before we hear about another local teen dying behind the wheel. According to the California Highway Patrol, on September 29, 2009, an eighteen-year-old El Dorado youth died late at night after his car veered off Highway 49 and struck a tree.

Some authorities say careful parents should never allow their young teenagers to drive after 9 p.m. at night. After all, the later teenagers are behind the wheel, the more likely they are to drink while driving or encounter dangerous drunk drivers out on the road.

Possible Solutions

There are a number of ways our society can try and stop this senseless loss of life. Three different approaches are outlined below.

A. Graduated Licensing

While nearly every American state has this type of licensing program, far too many states fail to carefully monitor and enforce them. “Graduated licensing” means that our youngest drivers are required to keep gaining more driving experience (while receiving added instruction), until they’re adequately trained to receive a full license. During the first six months teens drive under a “learner’s permit,” they must:

- receive a set minimum number of hours of adult driving supervision;
- restrict their night driving;
- restrict the number of passengers that can ride in the car with them; and

- never drink alcohol (or misuse any other type of drug) while driving.

B. Active Parenting of New Drivers

While teens rarely admit it, they usually crave their parents' approval and are eager to demonstrate their driving skills. It's important for responsible parents to regularly ride with their teens, encouraging them to master as many new driving challenges as they can.

Furthermore, parents can help their teens during their first six months of driving by occasionally getting behind the wheel and demonstrating their own preferred ways of handling difficult driving situations. For example, it can be very useful to a teen to watch how a parent successfully merges onto a freeway while speeding cars fail to slow down in the nearest open lanes.

It's equally useful for teen drivers to see their parents: (1) choose to park a bit further away from particular destinations so they can avoid the increased chance of getting hit in a crowded parking lot; (2) decide to avoid heavily traveled roads and freeways in favor of slower-moving traffic on quieter back streets; (3) choose to avoid speeding on through intersections every time traffic lights suddenly turn yellow; (4) always taking adequate time to correctly parallel park their cars; (5) choose to avoid using a cell phone to make or receive a call (or send or receive a text message) while driving; (6) decide to stop in a safe place and ask for directions when in unfamiliar areas; (7) always fastening their seatbelts, regardless of how short their errands may be; and (8) choose to never drive above a posted speed limit.

C. Choosing the Safest "Wheels"

Although small, sophisticated sports cars rank high on many teens' lists of preferred first vehicles, these types of cars can be very difficult for new drivers to maneuver on the roads. Teens should also avoid large SUV's (sport utility vehicles) that are top heavy and more likely to "roll over" during a crash. Likewise, cars with "sky roofs," fancy stereo systems and amplifiers, worn tire treads and poorly maintained brakes should never be purchased by (or for) new teen drivers.

Parents should remind teens that while it's wise to keep fuel economy issues in mind, it's always more important to choose cars that have a reputation for holding up well in collisions. Of course, driving the family car is often the best way to start out since kids are less likely to take risks when they must answer for damaging that car.

Conclusion

It's important to share the information set forth above with your teen and to regularly ride along as he or she attempts to master the art of driving. While riding as a passenger, be sure to compliment all of your teen's good driving skills, in addition to noting any errors they may make. Teens are more likely to listen to you if they think they're receiving a fair appraisal of everything they do.

If anyone in your family has been harmed in an auto accident, please feel free to contact our law firm for help. We've successfully assisted thousands of auto accident clients for nearly twenty years.

