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12 Safe Driving Tips for Teens

Motor vehicle accidents claim the lives of thousands of U.S. teens each year. That's why it's vital for young people to treat driving as a privilege that comes with great responsibility.

It's also why Mercury Insurance created the Drive Safe Challenge. Our initiative champions safe driving and offers education on everything from traffic laws and car maintenance to crucial driving skills and selecting the right vehicle.

Here are our best tips for new drivers (and more seasoned ones, too) to put into practice before hitting the road.

1. Get to Know Your Car

You have a license, and you're itching to get behind the wheel. Before you ever operate the car, make sure you understand how it works. Review the owner's manual so you're familiar with all the controls, buttons, and indicator lights. Learn the basics of car maintenance — how to pop open the hood, change a tire, locate the spare, and check tire pressure and oil levels. Make sure any car you operate comes equipped with a vehicle emergency kit.

2. Adjust Driver Settings

Whether you have a car, or share with others, you'll need to be in the best position for your height in order to operate your vehicle safely. That means adjusting your seat so your feet easily reach the pedals and you have a good line of vision out of the windshield. Adjust all mirrors to eliminate as many blind spots as possible and to increase vision all the way around your vehicle.

3. Remove Distractions

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that most crashes result from distracted driving. Distractions such as drowsiness, texting or phone calls, noisy or overly active passengers, eating, multi-tasking, and drowsiness all result in unsafe driving conditions. Reduce or remove these types of distractions while on the road so you can focus on keeping yourself and your passengers safe while driving.

4. Maintain Distance

Rear-end collisions make up a substantial portion of total injury crashes. Knowing what's around your car in addition to what's ahead will make you a more proactive driver. Allow plenty of space between you and the car in front of you so you can brake or change lanes as needed. Be sure to check your mirrors every 15 to 30 seconds to detect and respond to hazards quickly, and always double-check your blind spots before changing lanes.

5. Watch Your Speed

Speed limits are there for a reason. In addition to breaking the law by going too fast, speeding raises your risk of losing control of your car and lowers your ability to mitigate the severity of a crash if you experience a collision. Keep an eye on your speedometer anytime you're in the car for the safety of yourself and others.

6. Buckle Up

Teens tend to wear seatbelts less than any other demographic. Not only should you have your seatbelt on, but your passengers should also be properly fastened before you pull out of a driveway or parking lot. If younger children are riding in the car, ensure they have the proper restraints for their age, height, and weight, such as a car seat or booster.

7. Practice — And Then Practice More

As any athlete or musician knows, there's no such thing as too much practice. Get behind the wheel whenever you can, whether driving Mom to the store, going to soccer practice, or heading to school in the mornings. You can also take our good driver quiz to determine whether your practice is paying off.

8. Remain Calm

Maybe you have a sibling who argues with you in the car on the way to school, or you're stuck in heavy traffic due to an accident on the interstate. Stress can get the better of us in any scenario, but keeping focused on the road and taking a few deep breaths can help you remain calm in any driving situation. If you need to pull off the road to calm down, find a safe spot to take a few minutes.

9. Understand Passenger Laws

Many states have provisional licensing laws, meaning drivers' privileges increase as they gain years behind the wheel. If you have a provisional license, which is in effect for the first 12 months of driving or until you turn 18 (whichever comes first), you cannot carry other passengers unless they are over the age of 20. Having a passenger in the car increases your chances for distraction. Get familiar with any laws before you have someone else who isn't a parent in your car.

10. Don't Drink and Drive

You've seen the billboards and heard the stories on social media. Getting behind the wheel while under the influence of alcohol or drugs can quickly become deadly for yourself and anyone else on the road. The bottom line is: Just don't do it.

11. Put Away Your Phone

We use our phones for pretty much everything — to play music, check the weather, engage with social media posts, answer calls, respond to texts, play games, and much, much more. But they're also the culprits of distracted driving. If you typically play your music in the car from your phone, queue up your playlist before you begin your drive. Then set your phone to Do Not Disturb mode and place it out of reach in the backseat to reduce the temptation to scroll or text.



12. Limit Nighttime Driving

Many of your social activities occur in the evening or on weekends, but many states place nighttime driving limits on provisional and intermediate licenses. Not only do most accidents occur at night, but many provisional licenses have a nighttime driving restriction that requires a licensed adult in the car between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. If you're going out with friends, make sure it's before dark, or have an adult drop you off and pick you up.

The good news is that by creating healthy driving habits and educating yourself on teenage road safety at the outset, you'll be prepared to face any challenges you may encounter on the road. Mercury is here to help. Contact us to learn more about car insurance for teen drivers.