

Role of a Lifetime

By practicing good driving habits, parents leave a lasting impact on their teens.

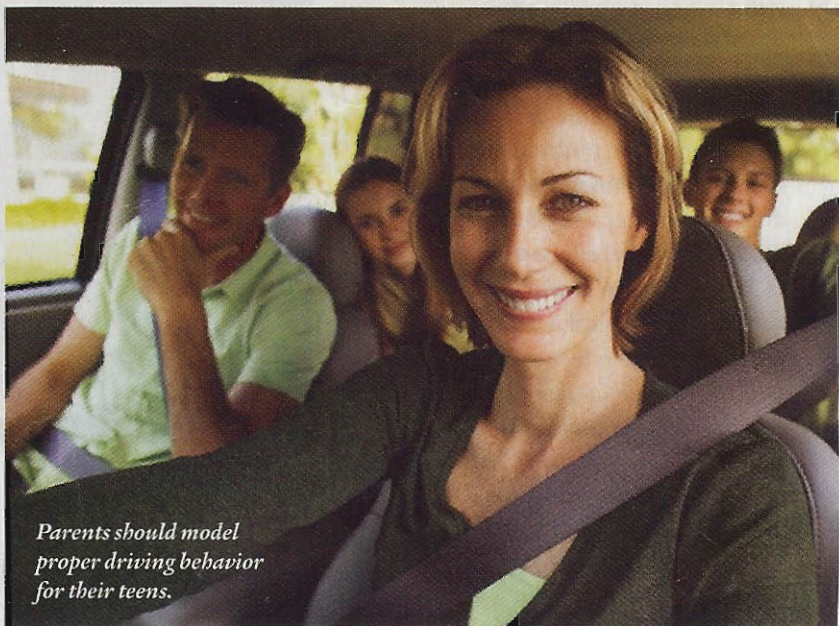
Children grow up so fast. One moment you're taking the training wheels off their bicycles. Then, before you've caught your breath, they're teenagers asking for the keys to the car.

The data about teens and driving can be frightening. However, one statistic matters most: Parents are their children's greatest role models.

In other words, no matter what you (or anyone else) tell them, your kids will pick up your driving habits—both good and bad. If you want your kids to wear their seat belts, it's not enough to tell them that federal research crash data shows that more than two-thirds of teens killed in crashes were not wearing seat belts. Lead by example. Buckle up every time you drive.

Start with the basics. Aside from wearing your seat belt, insist that everyone in the car also wear one. Always use turn signals and mirrors, and check your blind spots when turning or changing lanes. Something as simple as locking the doors will resonate with your teen.

"Talk to your teens about driving while they're passengers, and discuss what you're doing as you drive," says April Morrison-Harke. "Take advantage of unpredictable environments ... rain, curves, highways, city driving, etc." As a community outreach safety coordinator for AAA, Morrison-Harke



Parents should model proper driving behavior for their teens.

regularly gives driving advice to thousands of teens and parents at schools.

Never drink and drive. Avoid distractions, such as eating and adjusting the radio. Set an example by not texting or talking on your cell phone while driving, two especially risky behaviors for inexperienced young drivers. Drive with a positive attitude. Be patient and calm, and treat other drivers with courtesy.

Make your commitment official by signing a parent-to-teen agreement, which states that you and your teen will both be responsible drivers during this crucial learning period. AAA offers downloadable parent-to-teen contracts plus and other tools and resources at AAA.com/Teens.

Your child's first year as a driver will influence a lifetime of habits. So, when it counts most, you can still have a lasting impact on how they behave behind the wheel. ©

Q & A

I'm buying a car for my teen driver, what should I look for?

Providing your child with a safe, reliable vehicle not only protects your young driver, it also gives you peace of mind. Parents should consider a car with features like electronic stability control (ESC) and antilock brakes, which reduce the risk of a crash. Also, look for features that help reduce the likelihood of injury, should a crash occur, such as front and side air bags, and adjustable head restraints.

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ADVICE**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's safercar.gov Web site includes crash-test ratings for numerous vehicle makes and models. A vehicle history report from CARFAX (AAA members are eligible for a discount) will tell you if the car has been in a serious crash, sustained flood damage or if the odometer has been altered.

Have a traffic safety question for the experts at AAA? Send them to information@AAALiving.com.