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As Youth Traffic Safety Month Begins, Experts Remind Parents They Play Crucial Role In Guiding Teens' Safe Behavior Behind the Wheel

New Film from National Road Safety Foundation Documents Every Parent's Worst Nightmare

NEW YORK, April 28, 2022 -- As National Youth Traffic Safety Month begins in May, the National Road Safety Foundation reminds parents that they play a crucial role in encouraging their teens to drive safely.

Traffic crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for teens, with nearly 2,500 young people killed in crashes last year. Mile for mile, teens are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers, says the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. An average of six teens die every day in traffic crashes throughout the U.S.

"From when they are very young, our children watch how we drive," said Michelle Anderson, director of operations at The National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit group that for 60 years has been promoting safe driving behavior. "When it's their time to drive, they often do what they've seen their parents do. If they've grown up watching us speed, roll through stop signs and drive while using our phones, they are more likely to become dangerous drivers."

Experts suggest several simple things parents can do to help ensure their teens become safe drivers.

Learn about your state's graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws. GDL restrictions vary from state to state, so familiarizing yourself with the restrictions placed on your teen's license can help you enforce those laws. Parents should use the GDL laws to establish important ground rules for their teen drivers such as restricting night driving and passengers, prohibiting driving while using the phone or other electronic devices, and requiring seat belt use at all times.

Parents should talk to teens about the dangers of drug and alcohol use, especially as they drive. Remind them that it is illegal to drink under the age of 21, and it is illegal—and deadly—to drink and drive at any age.

Don't rely solely on driver's education classes to teach your teen to drive. Driver's education should be used as part of a GDL system, which in most states requires teens to have 30 or more hours of behind the wheel practice with a parent or other adult in order to qualify for a driver's license.

And finally, be a good role model. Your child looks to you as an example of how to drive, so practice safe driving yourself.

“Remember that your teen's learning starts at home long before he or she applies for a learner's permit, watching the way you drive every day and learning from your driving behavior,” Anderson said.

Teens can play a role in traveling safely by speaking up when in a vehicle being driven dangerously. “It's important to have the courage to intervene,” Anderson said. “Don't worry about being called a backseat driver. Explain that you care about yourself and the driver, which is why you are calling out speeding or impaired or distracted driving.”

A compelling mini-documentary from The National Road Safety Foundation tells a true story about every parent's nightmare – a fatal car crash involving their child.

“Not So Fast,” a nine-minute film by award-winning director Jessica Hester, tells about teenager Reid Hollister, who was killed when he lost control of his speeding car on a highway exit ramp and rolled down an embankment. The film shows the emotional toll on crash survivors – family and friends who are left behind. Reid's father Tim, an attorney, wrote two books to help warn parents about the dangers facing teen drivers and he talks with audiences nationwide about the risks of speeding and distraction, especially for young inexperienced drivers.

The film and the Passport to Safe Driving, a useful tool for parents and new drivers, can be viewed or downloaded free from <https://www.nrsf.org/resources/speed-aggression>.

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc., a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization founded 60 years ago, produces traffic safety programs on distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency, pedestrian safety and a host of other safety issues. It distributes the programs free of charge to schools, police and traffic safety advocates, community groups and individuals. It also sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities.

