

## Agree to rules of the road before allowing teens to get behind the wheel

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If you've ever talked on the phone, reached over to change music or even used a hands-free phone while driving, you can probably agree that you did not focus all of your attention on the road.

Now, put an inexperienced teen driver behind the wheel and it's easy to see why crashes are the leading cause of death for adolescents.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advises parents to be aware of the types of distractions that can lead to teen crashes and set limits to help prevent them.

"The most important thing that we as parents can do is set a good example when driving," said Joseph O'Neil, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, a member of the AAP Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention. "By the way," he added, "I am not giving this interview when I'm driving."



Not surprising, the radio and other technology such as cellphones and GPS devices, and eating and drinking take all drivers' attention away from the road.

Another big distraction is passengers, which is why many states limit the number of friends that teens can have in the car with them.

"If you take a teen driver and plug one teen in the passenger seat, you increase the risk of a crash by 44%," said Dr. O'Neil. That risk jumps to 200% with two passengers and 400% with three or four teen passengers.

On the other hand, teens learning to drive who have an adult passenger in the front seat have a very low crash risk, he noted.

Dr. O'Neil suggests that parents begin talking about driving safety when their children are preteens.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers five rules parents can use to reduce teen driving accidents: no cellphone use or texting while driving; no extra passengers; no speeding; no alcohol; and no driving or riding without a seat belt.

The AAP encourages parents to establish written teenager-parent contracts that place restrictions on the driver. At the very least, parents should limit nighttime driving and the number of teen passengers, the AAP advises. Start strict, then relax rules as the driver gets older and more experienced.

Find a sample parent-teen driving contract and other teen driving information at <http://bit.ly/2c1padM>.

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