

## THE TEEN DRIVER

keeping your child safe

-LeeAnn Shattuck

Is your teenager taking Driver's Ed, and soon will be asking for your car keys? Or maybe your teen already has a Drivers License, but you are afraid if he/she will be able to drive safely and responsibly? Unfortunately, your concerns are justified. Teen drivers are at significant risk on the road.

So, what can you as a parent do to keep your children safe? The first thing you should do is select a safe vehicle for your teen to drive. We all want our kid to drive the newest and coolest car out there, but that "image" can come with a cost. As I drive around town, I see these young and inexperienced drivers in Mustangs, BMW's and large SUVs. These automobiles are big, powerful and difficult to control for even experienced drivers. In the hands of a new driver, they can be deadly weapons. Small cars can also be dangerous, however, as they do not protect passengers as well in a front end crash. Your teen is safest in a midsize sedan with a four cylinder engine, airbags and a good crash test rating. You'll also save on gas and insurance costs! (For crash test ratings, visit the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety website at [www.iihs.org](http://www.iihs.org).)

Another step you can take to keep your teen driver safe is to monitor his or her driving behavior. You ask your kids who they are going to be with when they go out and where they are going. You call the parents of a friend who is having a party to make sure the kids will be properly supervised. You make rules, set limits, and check up on them. So, why not do the same thing when it comes to their driving behaviors?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) encourages parents to closely monitor and strictly limit their teen's driving in the first 12 - 18 months after obtaining a license. Limit where and when your teen is allowed to drive without you in the car, such as at night or in adverse weather. Require the use of seat belts, and do not permit the use of cell phones or MP3 players while driving. Limit the number of passengers your teen may have in the car when he or she is driving. My parents wouldn't let me have any passengers (except them) for the first 6 months. At the time, it made me angry that

I couldn't cruise around with my friends, but now I understand their wisdom.

You may choose to invest in an Event Data Recorder or GPS device to monitor your child's vehicle location and speed. When your teen driver speeds or does something with the car you don't approve, you will know. You may balk at such monitoring as an invasion of privacy, but it could save your child's life or the life of someone else. Just be honest with your teen about the existence of the device and that it is for their safety (and your peace of mind).

Finally, be aware of your own driving behaviors when your child is in the car with you - even years before he or she is eligible to drive. For better or worse, our children learn by watching us. If you speed, tailgate or yell at other drivers, your teen will too. The best thing you can do to teach your teen to be a responsible driver is to set a good example and be a safe and courteous driver yourself.



*LeeAnn Shattuck is the President and "Chief Car Chick" of Women's Automotive Solutions, Inc. Women's Automotive Solutions is a car buying service dedicated to helping women through the entire car selection and buying process. Their automotive experience enables them to save clients hundreds to thousands of dollars on a new or used car without the usual frustrations that come with car shopping. LeeAnn's contact information is included in our Local Business Directory on page 15.*

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## WHAT DO I DO NOW?

parenting older children

-Cheryl Abrams

The recent toy recall barely registered in our household. If that had been a mere ten years ago, I would have been in panic mode, but now the only recalls that grab my attention are for much more expensive "toys" - the kind with four tires or the electronic variety. We've traded in our Matchbox cars and Barbie dolls for cell phones, iPods, computers, digital cameras, bikes, and snowboards. (And by the way, we haven't really traded Barbie - she's stored in boxes in my attic.)

However, many of our habits and hangouts have changed over the years. We've traded in Sesame Street and Blue's Clues for The Simpsons and America's Next Top Model. We haven't been to the playground or Chucky Cheese (is it still open?) in years, but we sure spend a lot of time at the mall. I haven't heard a Raffi song in ages but ask me about Pink's latest hit and I'm pretty sure to have the right answer. I've heard of The Fray and The Plain White Tees, and that's not of the Fruit-of-the-Loom variety.

When my children were younger, the bags under my eyes were from years of interrupted sleep by babies who needed feeding, burping or changing and then children who needed drinks of water, back rubs or trips to the toilet from the drinks of water. My sleepless nights now are attributed to: Heartburn; much older children breaking curfew; our dog, Pepper, who has suddenly become afraid of thunder.

I sent my second child off to college and with less than a week to go I hadn't even stamped Bed, Bath & Beyond. My response to just about everything now is straight out of the teenage handbook: "whatever." I can roll my eyes just as dramatically as any one of my children - two teens and one - gulp - 21-year-old (a quasi-adult)!

And the most amazing part of all these changes is that they happened so gradually and so naturally that I didn't even realize how much had changed until very recently.

Many of my friends joke about how our kids are getting older but we're hardly aging. Of course, that is not true. Even though I swore - my generation swore - we would never turn into old fogies like our parents or grandparents before us, something happens as we age and we can't help ourselves from turning into those crabby, judgmental and set-in-their-ways parents. The music does sound louder and, excuse me, so much more stupid than our music. The clothing looks more and more, well, skimpy, but the prices are never skimpy to match. And then even though I said I would never complain about how much everything costs the way my parents did, I find myself scratching my head over \$3-a-gallon gasoline and \$3-a-gallon cartons of milk and orange juice.

Which reminds me of my grand scheme a few years ago when Beanie Babies were all the rage. I bought every Beanie Baby I could get my hands on and figured they would become collector items. I thought I'd sell them all and make a tidy little profit. If I still had those Beanie Babies,

maybe they would pay for one of those \$3 gallons of milk and juice. But alas, Pepper had other ideas for the collection and tore it to pieces around 1997 or 1998. Whatever.

I have to confess that two of the most difficult parts of parenting older children are setting a good example and being the voice of authority. Sometimes I hear myself saying things and wonder "who just said that?" because I know that the challenging-13-year-old and the know-it-all 18-year-old and the oh-so-sophisticated-21-year-old live inside of me, too. And sometimes "because I said so" and "because I'm an adult" don't cut it with the 12-25 year olds. It can seem like all older children are practicing to become stellar courtroom lawyers, arguing their case time after time. On the other hand, there can be great conversation - a far cry from "hands are not for hitting" and "don't forget to flush."

Probably one of the truest aspects of parenting is that we become more relaxed along the way. I may have freaked out when my oldest child refused to wear her boots on a snowy day in 1989, but now I just shrug when the same child wears flip-flops almost 12 months of the year. I'm not sure if they wear us down or we just wise up, but certainly the adage "you have to pick your battles" resonates more the older we all get.

Although many aspects of parenting have changed along the way, there are a few basic guidelines that haven't. And those are the ones that keep us all going year after year: keep everyone safe and healthy; laugh everyday (or try to maintain a sense of humor); respect and love one another.



Here's the funny thing: just when I will have adjusted to having adult children in my life, hopefully, these new babies will come along and the cycle will begin all over again. I will be watching Sesame Street and singing along with Raffi. Except this time, rules be damned because I will be the grandparent and not the parent! And that will make all the difference.

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