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Elizabeth Karmel

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Steer Them Straight

Car crashes are the leading cause of death among teenagers. You can help prevent these tragedies. *by LYNN MERRIFATH SCHREIBER*

TALK ABOUT REAL QUALITY TIME: Research shows that the more teens get behind the wheel with Mom or Dad in the car, the safer they'll be.

"Parents have a more important role to play than any other influence on teens learning to drive," says Anne McCartt, senior vice president for research at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Here's how to play that role well.

DRIVE, DRIVE, DRIVE Kids can spend thousands of hours on sports but only 100 hours (or less) on driver training, says Allison Altzman of the Defensive Driving Academy in Valencia, California. As the

keepers of the logs, parents must balance that out. Let them drive whenever you can, assuming conditions are safe. Use this time wisely. Monitor speed and speak up when kids go too fast (they're often unaware that they're speeding). Be attuned to space management—is there enough room between cars? Remember—your job in the passenger seat is an active one. Just make sure that your corrections and suggestions calmly and in a neutral tone.

SET LIMITS You know the dangers of texting behind the wheel, but do you live by the rules? If you're chatting on the

cell phone while driving, your kids are going to think that's OK. It's a parent's job to set limits and reward kids for following them—or punish them when they don't. Tell your teen to keep her cell phone handy but switched off in the car.

Also, laws in most states limit passengers and night-driving for teens, but it's up to you to make sure rules are followed.

TEACH SEEING "The best way to teach teens to drive is to show them how to really see the road," says Dr. Susan Smith Kuczmarski, author of *The Sacred Flight of the Teenager*. "Driving is a visual skill."

Say out loud what you see as you drive, and articulate what you do to drive safely. Turning left at a stop sign? Say, "I'm signaling a left turn 100 feet before the intersection. I'm slowing down. I'm stopping at the sign and looking both ways. I don't see any pedestrians—they'd have the right of way, you know. Now I'm turning."

Ask your teen to speak aloud what he sees outside the car. Listen closely, looking for omitted steps or sights. Discuss the importance of scanning ahead, not just focusing on what's immediately in front of the car. This can help keep your teen's driving record free of unnecessary humps. &

THE PROS KNOW

Don't let your teen's first emergency maneuver happen when he's alone on the road. A number of excellent driving schools offer advanced techniques for teens that go well beyond driver's ed. Here are a few examples:

■ **The Bridgestone Winter Driving School, Steamboat Springs, Colorado.** The best cold-weather driving instruction around; winterdrive.com or 800/949-7543

■ **The Rendon School of High Performance Driving in Phoenix.** An impressive teen driving course that teaches life-saving skills; rendonschool.com or 602/342-7212

■ **Street Survival, held at locations across the country.** A one-day class using your own car to teach teens advanced skills such as car handling limits; street-survival.org or 866/329-1919