

Secrets for Raising a Responsible Teenage Driver

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☒ When actor Jake Gyllenhaal was sixteen, his parents allowed actor and professional race car driver Paul Newman to take him out on the track for a driving lesson he'd never forget. While the boy sat transfixed in his seat Newman roared the NASCAR they were riding in straight at a wall only to steer clear of it at the last second with the admonition, "never do that."

Most parents of teenagers who are old enough to get their driver's licenses don't have a professional race car driver who can make an impression on their kids. But the good news is that as parents there are many things you can teach your child that will have the same effect.

No. 1: Don't push kids who are not ready.

Most teenagers can't wait to get behind the wheel for the first time because they know that driving will give them new freedoms. But if your child resists getting a license at 16, let him know that he can wait until he feels he is ready. And if you feel your child should wait until 17 to drive, when he will be more responsible, don't let your child pressure you into letting him drive just because other kids drive at 16.

No. 2: Set a positive tone.

When your teen is ready to drive, let him know that you think he will be a great driver. At the same time, grant privileges slowly so you can add more as your son or daughter demonstrates they are ready for them instead of having to take privileges away when your trust is violated. Teenagers love to test their parents and in fact it is their job to do so. It is the parents' job to set clear rules and to hold teenagers responsible when they are violated. Consider rewarding your teen if he or she is accident-free for a certain period of time and remove restrictions when you find they are no longer necessary.

No. 3: Sign a Contract.

The best way to lay out the rules you expect your new driver to follow is to put them in a contract you both will sign. The contract should cover such things as the number of friends who can be in the car with the new driver (most likely one), what time the driver must be home on school nights and weekends, responsibilities for gas, insurance and car maintenance and the mandatory use of seat belts for all passengers.

No. 4: Don't give him an excuse to drive drunk.

Even though you have made it absolutely clear that there is to be no drinking and driving, you should let your teen know that you will pick him or her up with no questions asked wherever they are if they are drunk or the driver who took them somewhere is incapable of driving. Teens who are afraid their parents will "kill them" are more likely to take the risk of driving drunk or get in the car of an impaired person because they are afraid of getting in trouble.

No. 5: Be a good role model.

Make certain that your driving habits don't conflict with any of the rules you have set for your teenage driver. Don't drive if you have had a few drinks and keep your temper in check in situations that could lead to road rage. Your teenager is paying as much attention to what you do as what you tell him to do.

<http://www.stopdrinkingadvice.org/guide/>

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