



PARTNERING WITH PARENTS TO DELIVER SAFE DRIVING INSTRUCTION

By: Violet Marrero

The boundary between home and school is more fluid now than ever. When it comes to driver education, that fluidity may work out for the better. Research conducted by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) found that teens' crash risk is as much as 50% lower when their parents set rules, offer support and monitor their driving. Schools can significantly impact learning outcomes by actively partnering with parents to teach safe driving habits.

Before the coronavirus pandemic began, teen drivers were already most at risk of experiencing a car crash. This risk is highest during the first 12 to 24 months of driving, and it has likely increased as teen drivers have lost opportunities to practice driving due to coronavirus-related restrictions.

Parents play a pivotal role in enforcing safe driving and the Graduated Drivers Licensing (GDL) laws. The GDL laws, especially the curfew and passenger restrictions, are the most effective tools for reducing teen traffic fatalities. By ensuring their young

drivers complete the full 65 hours of required practice driving, and by monitoring their access to the car, parents can help their teens develop safe driving skills for life.

Effective Partnerships with Parents

In an effective parent-teacher partnership, parents model safe driving habits and give their teens plenty of opportunities to practice driving, while teachers offer support and subject matter expertise. During each phase of licensure, teachers have the opportunity to provide guidance to parents:

Pre-Permit Phase: Teens mimic their parents' behaviors. Parents should act as positive role models by obeying the posted speed limits and avoiding distracted driving.

Permit Phase: Through the SAFE model, families can work practice into their family's daily schedule:

- **Shopping Trips** teach teens how to navigate the challenges of commercial districts, including parallel parking and pedestrian traffic within parking lots;

- **Activities** (after-school and extracurricular) give teens the chance to practice safe habits and learn how to travel alternative routes;
- **Family Outings** provide experience with additional passengers and on new roadways, including toll roads and highways; and
- **Errands** give teens more time behind the wheel, when parents can gauge their progress and provide constructive feedback.

It is also important for teens to practice in difficult situations, such as driving at night and in inclement weather, merging and changing lanes, recognizing different speed zones, and maintaining a safe following distance.

Junior License Phase: After a teen driver has received their Junior license, it's important to support the GDL restrictions and reinforce safe driving habits by setting clear, consistent expectations with rules, consequences and rewards. Teenagers who share a vehicle with their parents are less likely to violate the Graduated



Licensing Laws and be involved in a crash, compared with teens who have primary access.

Through every stage of licensing, teachers reinforce the rules of the road. Teachers can provide expert insight into driving hazards and provide guidance on how to handle them.

Post-Pandemic Teen Driver Safety Campaigns

As schools reopen for in-person classes, it's important to raise awareness of the increasing risks confronting young drivers. School-wide driver safety campaigns can spread the message to all students, including those who have completed driver education courses.

These are some risks schools can anticipate as drivers get back on the road:

- Distracted driving is increasing year over year. Draw students' attention to the three types of distraction: cognitive, manual and visual. Explain that while phones are one major cause of distraction, vehicle technology, passengers and stress can also draw drivers' attention away from the road. Schools can also support awareness by participating in NJM's Just Drive PSA competition. To learn more, visit justdrive.njm.com.

- School zones present drivers with challenges uncommon to other areas of town. For example, the speed limit may change on a road when school is in session. Pedestrian traffic may be higher or more unpredictable when many children and teenagers are present. Additionally, there are several laws relating to safe driving around school buses.
- Speeding has been an issue in many areas as cars have returned to the roads. Reinforce the importance of following posted speed limits. The GDL laws penalize teenagers for speeding, potentially delaying them from getting their unrestricted license. Also, the risk of crashing increases with each mile per hour driven over the speed limit, and fatal crashes are far more likely when driving at high speeds.

The pandemic may have delayed teens from getting their permits or licenses, but it doesn't need to delay safe driving instruction and practice. Effective driver education starts in the home and is reinforced through constant parental involvement. Schools that partner with parents can improve teen driver outcomes and reinforce safe habits from the classroom to the road.

About Violet Marrero

Violet Marrero is the Consumer Safety Director at NJM Insurance Group, where she manages NJM's Teen Driver Safety Program. The award-winning program, which includes Share the Keys, "What Do You Consider Lethal?" and the Just Drive campaign, has reached more than 150,000 parents and students in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In 2016, the National Safety Council honored the program with its Teen Driver Safety Leadership Award. This coveted honor recognizes organizations that work to improve teen driver safety and save lives through dedicated community outreach and innovative educational programming.

