Be the example; be the driver you want your teen to be

Traffic crashes are the second leading cause of death among Minnesota teens age 15-19, according to the MN Department of Public Safety. This is due to driver inexperience, risk-taking behavior, distracted driving, and speeding. These crashes are preventable. Learning to drive is an important milestone in life and parents play a key role in raising safe and confident drivers.

Parents are the number one influencer of teen behavior, so it is imperative to model safe driving habits. Be the type of driver you want your teen to be.

Drive distraction-free. Parents who talk on cell phones, send texts, or eat and drink while driving have teens who are 2 to 4 times more likely to do the same. (University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute and Toyota, 2012) Put the phones away and set your music and GPS before you get on the road. Safe driving requires both hands on the wheel, eyes on the road and mind on driving.

Buckle Up! Stress the importance of always wearing a seat belt regardless of the distance you are traveling.

Don't Drink and Drive. Teens are more likely to drink and drive if they see their parents doing it. One third of all traffic fatalities in drivers aged 16-19 are caused by drinking and driving. (MN Office of Traffic Safety) Set strict rules about drinking and let your child know that they can call for help if they need a ride, without the fear of repercussions.

Drowsy driving is dangerous. Make sure your teen understands the importance of getting enough sleep before driving.

Follow the Graduated Driving Licensing Law. Educate yourself on the laws regarding your teen's license and make sure they are following the rules. Violating these laws is a misdemeanor, which can result in fines and temporary loss of driving privileges.

Slow down and obey speed limits. Speeding increases the risk that a crash will end in an injury. Inexperienced drivers need to be taught how to manage their speed depending on traffic and road conditions and how to keep a safe distance from other vehicles.

Limit the number of passengers your teen is allowed to have. Numerous studies have shown that passengers increase the risk of crashes for novice drivers due to the added distraction.

Practice makes perfect. Driving is a complex skill that takes patience, time, and lots of practice. Spend as much time behind the wheel with your teen as possible. Make sure to drive in various weather conditions, on all types of roadways and at different times of the day and night.

You are your child's best teacher. By setting a safe driving example and spending extra time in the passenger seat, you will increase the chances of your teen being a safe driver.

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Written on behalf of Safe Communities of Wright County