

# Homecoming Safety Tips for Parents and Teen Drivers



The number one killer of teens in the U.S. is traffic accidents. As we get into the peak of Homecoming season, it's important for parents and teens to work together to make sure that everyone comes home safely from the dance.

Here are some safety and planning tips to help make this Homecoming a memorable one...for the right reasons.

## **Before Homecoming:**

**Practice!** Has your teen ever driven the route from home to their date's house, to the restaurant, to school, and back? Have they driven it at night? There's a big difference between driving a route after school in the daylight and driving it on a dark Fall night.

Take a test drive with them in advance. Make sure it's around the same time of day that they'll be driving to and from the dance, so they'll be comfortable with the route and the road and lighting conditions.

**Coded Emergency Plan.** Often, teens are afraid to look like a 'tattle tale' or a 'buzz kill' and may not act, even when they don't feel safe. It's a good idea to establish a code word that they can text or use in a phone call to alert you that they need to be picked up. Take the time before Homecoming to work out the details, so that both you and your teen know the plan *before* you need it.

One suggestion is to have a family friend available if your teen needs a ride. If they're hesitant to call Mom and Dad for fear of getting in trouble, maybe having someone else who they can trust will make your teen more likely to do the right thing.

Also, as part of this plan, make sure to account for a dead cell phone battery. Teens should take their car charger with them. Parents should also have the cell phone numbers of everyone their teen will be with before and after Homecoming, so they can

be reached through their friends' phones. Teens should also know before they head out to the dance that if their phone dies, they need to check in with you at regular intervals.

**Curfew.** Make sure that your teen and their date know what time they are each expected home. Since most teens are still on provisional drivers' licenses, the curfew built into the rules of the license makes it easy to set that time.

When you take the test drive of the route, make sure they understand the timing of the drive and how much time they need to allow to drop off their date and to get home safely before curfew. (*And if it's a first date, they may want to allow extra drop off time for that awkward good night*).

**Be Aware of Fall Conditions.** Being a Fall event, Homecoming presents a unique set of driving conditions. It gets darker earlier. Leaves can collect on roads, and if it's wet, will cause cars to lose traction and go into a slide. Also, as trees lose their leaves, deer and other animals tend to move closer to populated areas (and roads) in search of food. In some places in Maryland, we even have snow to contend with for Homecoming. Make sure your teen driver is prepared for these hazards...on Homecoming night, and in general.

**Buckle Up.** (No, we're not talking about the 2012 Orioles rally cry). "*The seat belt is wrinkling my dress.*" "*...it's crushing my corsage!*" These aren't excuses to skip the seat belt. If you encounter those wet leaves or a deer on the way to the dance, that seat belt can mean the difference between getting to Homecoming late and never getting there at all. Also...it's the law. Click it or ticket.

**No Texting and Driving!** [40% of teens admit](#) that they've been in a car with a teen driver who has used a cell phone in a way that has put them in danger. Make sure that your teen knows to put the phone away whenever they're driving. Or if they're the passenger, to say something to the driver or offer to send the text for them. (*And just a hint for the guys: your date doesn't want to compete with your cell phone for your attention...not in the car, at dinner, or the dance. So do yourself a favor and leave the phone in your pocket. Well, unless your parents are calling. Then, definitely answer it...just not while you're driving*).

#### **After Homecoming:**

**No Alcohol or Drugs!** It goes without saying that anyone attending a high school Homecoming Dance is too young to drink. And it doesn't matter what age you are, it's illegal to drink or use drugs and drive. But according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, [22% of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking](#). Make sure your teen knows not to get into a car with anyone who has been drinking or is otherwise impaired, under any circumstances. They may feel pressure to get in the car with their date or whoever drove them to the dance or party, especially if it's getting close to curfew. Remind them that this is exactly the scenario that the Emergency Plan is for, and to call or text.

This also goes for parents! If you're playing chauffeur and will be shuttling teens to and from the dance, make sure you don't have a glass or two of wine or a beer while you're waiting for that call to come pick them up.

**After Party?** It's important to know where your teens and their dates are going after the dance. Is there a party? Will there be adult supervision? Make sure to touch base with the parents of the party host to make sure that there will be no alcohol available.

Know your teen's plans and timeline for the night, and make sure they stick to it. And talk to the parents of your teen's date or the group of friends they're going to the dance with to make sure that the plans and timeline you've been given mesh with what they've heard.

Sometimes, in trying to make sure our kids have a "special" night, we miss the most important details. Too many teens never make it home from Homecoming.

But with good communication, a little planning, firm expectations and guidelines, and lots of cooperation, parents and teens can both have a fun, memorable, and safe Homecoming night. (Not that it will help the parents worry any less until they see that car pull into the driveway at the end of the night).