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National Teen Driver Safety Week: Parents Are the Key to Teens Driving Safely Parents Should Talk to Teens and Be Good Role Models Behind the Wheel

NEW YORK, Oct. 21, 2024 — The National Road Safety Foundation reminds parents that National Teen Driver Safety Week, Oct. 20- 26, is a good time for parents to have a conversation with their teens about safe driving habits.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for teens in the United States. Latest statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) show 2,608 people were killed in crashes involving a teen driver in 2021, while an estimated 94,201 teen drivers were injured in traffic crashes and more than 170,000 people were injured in crashes involving a teen driver. Inexperience is a major factor in teen crashes, with teens more likely than older drivers to underestimate or not be able to recognize dangerous situations. They also are also more likely than adults to make critical errors that can lead to serious crashes.

“Parents need to be proactive and begin a conversation about safe driving during National Teen Driver Safety Week,” said Michelle Anderson, director of operations at the National Road Safety Foundation. “Keep the conversations going every day. Teaching teens safe driving behaviors is a shared responsibility, and we all have a part to play.”

The National Road Safety Foundation offers tips for talks with teens in its Passport to Safe Driving, available free online at <https://www.nrsf.org/passport-safe-driving>.

NHTSA also has detailed information and statistics on teen driving, and outlines tips parents can use to address teen driver safety risks at www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving.

Among the key issues that deserve parental discussion are:

1. **Impaired Driving:** While teens are too young to legally consume alcohol, nationally 19% of teen passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2021 had alcohol in their system. Marijuana also affects a driver’s ability to react to their surroundings. Remind teens that driving under the influence of any impairing substance — including many prescription drugs or over-the-counter medication — can have deadly consequences.

2. **Seat Belts:** Wearing a seat belt is a simple way teens can stay safer in a vehicle. Yet too many teens aren't buckling up. More than half (51%) of the teen drivers who died in crashes in 2021 were unbuckled. Parents should encourage their teens to be firm and confirm that everyone is buckled before the vehicle moves.
3. **Distracted Driving:** Among teen drivers involved in fatal crashes, 7% were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. Cell phone use while driving is more than just risky — it can be deadly. Texting while driving is outlawed in 49 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. Distracted driving isn't limited to cell phone use. Other passengers, audio and climate controls in the vehicle, and eating or drinking while driving can be dangerous distractions for any driver.
4. **Speed:** Speeding is a critical issue for all drivers, but it's especially deadly for teens with less experience. Nearly one-third (32%) of all teen drivers involved in fatal crashes were speeding at the time of the crash. Data shows that males were more likely to be involved in fatal speeding-related crashes than females. Remind teens to always drive within the speed limit.
5. **Passengers:** Passengers in a teen's vehicle can lead to disastrous consequences. Research shows the risk of a fatal crash dramatically increases in direct relation to the number of passengers in a vehicle. The likelihood that a teen driver will engage in risky behavior triples when multiple passengers are in the same vehicle.

Parents should also encourage their teens and all family members to speak up if in a vehicle being driven unsafely. "We shouldn't worry about being considered a 'back-seat driver,'" said Anderson. "Speaking up can save lives."

Surveys show that teens whose parents have discussions on safe driving behavior and set firm rules are typically engaged in less risky driving behaviors and are involved in fewer crashes.

"Parents often complain that their teens don't listen to them," said Anderson, "but studies show they watch what we do. It's up to us as parents to be good role models by demonstrating safe driving behavior all the time, long before teens even think about getting their learner's permit."

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc. (NRSF) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit charitable organization that for more than 60 years has been dedicated to reducing crashes, deaths and injuries on our nation's highways by promoting safe driving habits through greater public awareness.

NRSF programs deal with distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency and pedestrian safety. The Foundation also works with key youth advocacy groups and sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities. For more information or to download free programs, visit www.nrsf.org.

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