



Scott Kuhne COMMENTARY

## Guest column: Parents, teach your teen drivers how to handle dangers on the road

By Scott Kuhne

Obtaining a driver's license is a milestone for any teenager. Yet for parents, it's a time of concern that their teen will handle their newly earned freedom properly.

Parents have reason for concern. Consider this:

- One in five 16-year-olds crashes in the first year of driving.

- Younger, inexperienced drivers are much more likely to be involved in an accident than someone over the age of 25.

- Seventy-seven percent of all 16-year-olds' crashes are due to driver error.

- The No. 1 killer of teens is auto-related accidents. More than 6,000 die each year, and 480,000 are injured.

While it might sound like a good idea for parents to keep their teenager off the road entirely, a better, more realistic solution is to teach teens how to react to dangerous situations that can cause accidents. Among the scenarios:

**Wildlife:** It not unusual for a rogue deer, squirrel or a fearless cat to run in front of a car when you least expect it. Yet teens often try to avoid these animals by swerving, which can take them into oncoming traffic or into a ditch. Instead, teach teens to look to see whether another car is close behind and, if safe, hit the brakes hard while keeping the car straight. Chances are the animal will run across the road before it can be hit.

**Tires dipping off the road:** Sometimes a distraction or a wrong move by a driver in the next car causes teens to swerve and dip their tires off the road.

When this happens, the best response is to continue steering straight ahead and let the car reduce speed by slowly letting off the gas pedal. Tell the teenager to avoid slamming on the brakes. When the car has slowed down significantly, steer straight ahead and return slowly to the road.

**Tire blowout:** Many things outside of one's control can cause a blowout, but only a few driving techniques will allow a teen to walk away safely from the situation.

Often a teenager's first reaction is to slam on the brakes, which can cause the tire to lock up and for the driver to lose complete control of the car. Instead, tell them to firmly grip the wheel and slowly lift their foot off the gas pedal to slow down the car, while steering straight. When the car has slowed down sufficiently, pull off the road as far as possible without making any quick movements.

If it's a back tire that blows out, the car will weave back and forth and vibrate, but can be controlled as in normal conditions. If the freeway or road is not safe to park, the teens should drive slowly along the shoulder with their hazard lights on until they find a safe place to park away from traffic.

**Hydroplaning:** Driving on a wet road can be dangerous. Yet even the most cautious drivers find themselves hydroplaning in areas where there are large pockets of water.

To avoid hydroplaning: Slow down in the rain, increase your following distance and tell your teens that they should drive slowly and if possible drive in the tire tracks left by the cars in front. If they begin hydroplaning, tell them to avoid slamming on the brakes or turning suddenly. Instead, lift off the gas pedal, slowing the car down until they feel the wheels touch the road again. Then slowly push the gas pedal to keep the car moving.

**Distractions:** Distractions contribute to more than 4,300 crashes a day. Warn your teens that even those things that take our attention off the road for just a second, such as looking for a CD or grabbing an object from the passenger seat, can lead to serious accidents. Remind them to make sure they turn their cell phones off and keep talking to passengers to a minimum. While it may seem awkward at the time, it might be the difference between life or death.

**Scott Kuhne is the executive producer of "Road Skillz," an educational DVD that offers parents a way to get their teens interested in driving safely.**



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