

Is Your Teen Ready to Drive?

Your child is now a teenager and wants to drive. While driving may be a rite of passage in a young person's life, driving is not a right. **It is a privilege** - a privilege that is earned. The biggest question you will ask yourself at this stage in your child's development is whether your teen is ready to drive.

Age is certainly not the only factor that should determine if your teen is ready to drive. It doesn't matter if your child is old enough to legally drive. The question is whether your child is responsible and mature enough to be handed the keys to the car. The teen years are an extremely challenging time in almost every aspect of life, whether it is learning how to deal with emotional stress, academic stress, peer pressure or problems with parents. Adding the responsibility of maneuvering three thousand pounds of metal down crowded city streets and busy highways is a heavy load for any teenager's shoulders.

Some teens are ready for this new stage in life; others are not. Every teenager will not be ready to drive the moment he turns 15. As parents, it is your job to keep your children safe. You can do this by truthfully analyzing your child's potential driving skills as well as his emotional and mental readiness as it relates to driving. Not only is it reasonable for parents to expect their children to demonstrate a certain level of maturity before allowing them to get a driver's license, but it's also important to expect responsible behavior after a driver's license is obtained.

Ask yourself questions about your teen's maturity level. It may seem unfair when you judge their potential driving competence on other factors, but there are obvious signs that your teen may not be ready to drive. Here are some things you can evaluate in your teen's life to determine if you think he is ready to enter the driving stage and take on the huge responsibility. You may want to at least put your child on "probation" and allow him to earn the privilege to drive.

Aware of Surroundings

Is your teen consciously aware of his surroundings? Does he know what is going on around him at all times and does he act or react appropriately? If so, he may be ready to drive. In addition to having insight and perception to his surroundings, teens must also learn how to develop peripheral awareness and to be able to foresee or predict the behavior of others.

If a teen has not reached this milestone in life, he will not be able to handle the driving task. A competent driver must be alert and tuned in to the surroundings at all times. In other words, he must be a defensive driver and must know how to act and react to situations and other drivers' behavior. Awareness is a skill that can be taught.

Follows the Rules and keeps their word

A crucial indicator of a teen's readiness to drive is how well he follows your rules. Does your teen keep the rules of the home, respect authority, and does what he says he will do? A teen that does not keep a curfew or his word / promise and challenges or defies authority (openly or in secret) is not responsible enough to follow the rules of the road. In addition, teens who do not respect authority are not ready to be trusted to stay within their driving boundaries.

Attitude/Manners

Does your teen have a good attitude and good manners toward others? Does your teen listen to authority figures? Does he follow the "golden rule"? A teen who is courteous, respectful, and who displays good manners toward others is displaying the kind of attitude that is needed in the driving world.

A teen that has a bad attitude, and who is rude to others, defies authority, who cannot control his anger, and who acts on impulse is not emotionally mature to begin the driving experience. Impulsive moodiness has no place on the road.

Desire vs. Need to Drive

A teen should have the desire to drive. Some teens know they are not ready to drive and they should not be pushed or cajoled to think otherwise. You can gradually introduce them to driving, but only when they are ready. Don't let your desires (for him to drive so your chauffeuring days can come to an end) place undue pressure on him to take on this level of responsibility.

Does he really need to drive? Does he have a part-time job? Is he involved in extra curricula activities? A teen that holds a part-time job may need to drive to work sometimes. If he holds a part-time job, he has demonstrated a level of responsibility that indicates that he may be ready to drive.

Anger Control

A teen who is ready to drive is also an emotionally mature teen. While teens mature at different rates, the teen that can curb anger and restrict harsh words will make a reasonable driver. If the teen cannot control his anger, he may not be ready to drive.

Impulse Control

Teens that can control impulsivity may be ready to get behind the wheel. An impulsive teen may make decisions based on what he wants to do rather than doing the right thing. For example, an impulsive teen may have no qualms about driving in a rain storm to visit a friend. An emotionally mature teen will weigh the possible consequences of going out in the storm.

Peer Pressure

Is your teen particularly susceptible to peer pressure? The need to fit in with friends affects nearly every teenager. Teens that give in too easily to the demands of their peers, or make poor decisions to impress their friends, may engage in risky behavior like speeding or drinking and driving.

Rational Decision Making

Is your teen confident and capable of making rational decisions? Can he think on his feet? An indecisive teen is not ready to drive since he is incapable of making quick rational decisions. Putting him behind the wheel of a car is not a good idea. A confident teen, capable of making decisions based on facts, may be ready to make similar decision while driving. Driving requires constant decision making – such as when to slow down or speed up, when to swerve to miss an accident, as well as decisions such as whether it is a good idea to try and drive in certain types of weather, and more. Drivers must be able to process the facts and make quick rational decisions and to react to them.

Results

Based on the answers to the previous questions you should have a good idea as to whether your teen is ready to drive. If he is not ready, talk to him and explain how you derived at this decision. Outline what actions and behaviors he should improve on to get ready to drive, whether it is his need to learn how to tune-in to his surroundings, make better decisions, or get a better attitude.

When your teen is ready to drive, the next step is to enroll him in a driver's education course. Some high schools offer the course. Commercial driver education providers are located throughout the state. Visit our web site, www.expresslane.org, for a list of licensed providers in your area. Talk with other parents or get references when choosing a driver education provider.

Your teen should also download a copy of the Louisiana Driver's Guide so he can begin to prepare to take and successfully pass the knowledge test.

As the parent, you will receive a guide that will assist you in continuing the learning process after your teen receives his learner's permit. This guide was prepared by Safe Road Alliance in conjunction with the Louisiana Department of Public Safety, Office of Motor Vehicles.

TAKE IT SLOW. As your teen's driving ability and experience improves, gradually introduce him to other situational challenges.

Determining whether a 15 year-old is ready to drive can be one of the hardest decisions for a parent to make. You know what's best for your child. Set guidelines and standards for behavior and outline the consequences for non-compliance. Let's work together to teach your new driver to be safe and responsible.

Sources

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