



IS YOUR TEEN REALLY READY TO BE SAFE BEHIND THE WHEEL? *Some Quick Ways to Find Out*

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Love & Logic

Decrease the odds of tragedy by asking yourself the following questions:

Does my teen respectfully follow the rules of the home and school?

If a teen is unable to follow simple rules about respect, chores, etc., they aren't ready for the complex rules of the road. A quick and simple test to determine whether a teen is ready to drive is to ask them to do something that requires some inconvenience and effort. Let's look at an example:

Parent: "Josh, will you please have the yard raked by tomorrow afternoon? Thanks!"

Josh: "Aw, man! None of my friends has to do chores. This is so bogus."

From this example, we can see that Josh is not ready to drive! If he thinks doing a simple chore is unfair, it's a sure bet that he'll think that speed limits are bogus, too.

Let's look at another:

Parent: "Amy, will you please get the living room dusted by this evening?"

Amy: "Yeah, okay Mom." (But the chore never gets done.)

Amy's not ready to drive, either. If she can't pay attention long enough to dust one room, what are the chances she'll be able to do it long enough to remain safe behind the wheel?

Smart parents set the following limit: "I will take the club off of your steering wheel when I see that you are willing to do what I ask without arguing...and without forgetting."

Does my teen know how to cope with frustration in a calm way?

If a teen is prone to fits of anger, the chances of road rage are high. If your teen has a short fuse, it's wise to say the following:

Parent: "I'm not ready to let you drive yet."

Adam: "What's your problem? This sucks! Why do you hate me?"

Parent: "You're drunk too often."

Adam: "What? I don't drink!"

Parent: "I'm not talking about alcohol. I see you getting drunk on your anger."

Adam: (Just rolls his eyes in disgust)

Parent: "When you're drunk, you can't think well enough to be a safe driver."

Adam: "I hate you!"

Parent: "When I see you handling your anger without getting drunk on it, I'll put the wheels back on your car."

Is my teen willing to limit the number of passengers in the car?

Parent: "How many people are going to be in the car with you?"

Rachel: "I don't know. I mean, what's the big deal?"

Parent: "I just hope you aren't one of those kids that gets tricked."

Rachel: "Like what do you mean?"

Parent: "Some kids get tricked into thinking they can ignore a bunch of their friends goofing off in the car as they are driving. Then they end up six feet under the ground instead of hanging out with their friends."

Rachel: "Oh, Mom!"

Parent: "Do you know that the more people you have in the car with you, the more likely you will have an accident?"

Rachel: "So?"

Parent: "You may drive the car as long as I can trust that you will only have one friend with you at a time."

If you get the gut level feeling that your teen is willing to break this rule, trust your innards!

Does my teen have a safe driving record so far?

The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. It's easy to fall into the trap of making excuses for a teen's bad driving record. Don't let this become a deadly mistake.

Is my teen making a significant financial... or "sweat"... investment in the driving privilege?

The more a teen invests in his or her car, its maintenance, and insurance, the safer they will drive. Some parents pave the way for safe driving before their kids reach adolescence. Consider the following discussion between a parent and their ten-year-old son:

Parent: "Jeremy, I hope that you are able to start driving when you are sixteen."

Jeremy: "What are you talking about? I have to drive when I'm sixteen."

Parent: "Not really. Some kids don't have enough money to pay for the expenses."

Jeremy: "What are you talking about?"

Parent: "In this family, kids drive when they can pay for at least half of the expenses, such as gas, maintenance, insurance, etc."

Jeremy: "Yeah but how am I supposed to get all that money?"

Parent: "I think I can give you some suggestions about how to earn and save enough money so that it will be easier when you're sixteen. Are you interested in my thoughts?"

Jeremy: "I guess. What can I do?"

And so on...

Can you imagine how much safer kids drive when they spend months or years earning and saving money to go toward the privilege?

Thanks for reading!

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