

Practice – Tips for Driving with Your Teen

Under YOUR Influence



It's important to remember a few things when practicing driving with your teen.

- **Don't be pushy. If your teen is not ready to start learning, do not force them into it.** Forcing them only causes them to be more nervous during a time that already causes a high sense of anxiety. Mention that you are available to help them learn, but let them come to you first.
- **You are in control.** You are the teacher, and you make the best decisions for your teen.
- **Set some basic ground rules.** For example, you won't drive over 30 mph the first week, you must always wear your seat belt, you must be willing to take constructive advice, etc.
- **Pack your patience.** If you are a parent who can teach your teen how to drive without getting a little frustrated or anxious, you should get some kind of award. A huge one. There are going to be times when you get upset and when your teen gets upset. Talk to each other before they get behind the wheel. Let them know that you are on their side.
- **Don't talk down to your teen when you are teaching them how to drive.** Learning to drive a car is a very adult thing to do, and your teen is wanting more and more to be treated like an adult. Talking to them like you used to when they threw cereal on the floor or broke a toy will do nothing to build a relationship between the two of you when you practice. They need to know that you respect them and that you trust them. And don't talk in generalities, like "You never stop at a stop sign correctly" or "You always drive too fast in parking lots". This only attacks their character, and frustration will soon set in.
- **Be sure to give specific praise to your teen as they drive.** For example, "I like how calmly you stopped the car at that last intersection" or "You really did a good job merging lanes as we got off the freeway". These kinds of comments will really stick with your teen. They want to impress you, and they need to know that they are going in the right direction.
- **Set a specific agenda for each time you take your teen out to practice.** Here are some ideas: freeway driving, stopping at intersections, parking, merging lanes, residential driving, obeying crosswalk laws, etc.
- **Keep your conversations focused on driving.** Do not bring up last night's fight about curfew or who they will be taking to the prom. Your teen is nervous already. They don't need to be distracted by other things going on in their life.
- **Set a time limit that both you and your teen can agree on.** Driving for too long will probably cause more arguments and anxiety. Keep the time on the road short and sweet.
- **Keep a driving log while you practice.** Take note of things to improve, things your teen is doing well, and other notes of interest. Discuss the log with your teen at the end of each driving session.
- **Don't stop talking with your teen after they get a license.** Continue the safe driving conversation.