

BEST OF THE JUGGLE

Excerpts from WSJ.com's Work & Family Blog

Teen-Driver Accidents Hurt Others More

BY SUE SHELLNBARGER

Having a teen driver is a mixed blessing for many families. For some parents, having teens drive themselves can mean less schlepping to and from after-school activities. On the other hand, many parents of teens worry about the fact that auto accidents are the No. 1 cause of death among teenagers—exceeding homicide, suicide and cancer combined.

And did you know that nearly one-third of the people killed by teen drivers aren't even riding in the teens' cars?

In another cause for caution in handing your teen the car keys, a new study shows 30% of fatalities inflicted by teen drivers are cyclists, pedestrians, occupants of other vehicles and other users of the road. In all, more than a half-

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million people in 2008 were involved in crashes where a teenage driver was behind the wheel, says the study by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm.

Teen-driver crashes also cause more injuries to passengers and occupants of other vehicles than to the teenage drivers themselves, the study shows.

Teen highway fatalities have fallen 30% since states began enforcing tougher teen-driving laws in the mid-1990s. These measures typically delay teens' getting a learner's permit until age 16, then require 30 to 50 hours of supervised driving before they are eligible for a license.

Nevertheless, car crashes still account for 24% of total teen deaths from any cause, and should be regarded "as a public health issue affecting all

members of a community—whether they have a teen driver in the family or not," the study says, citing an example of a 7-year-old Indianapolis girl who was killed when a 16-year-old driver with a provisional driver's license struck her mother's car.

Readers, how do you prepare your teenage driver to stay safe on the road?

Readers:

"One thing that I found helpful was to begin transitioning the teen from 'passenger' to 'driver' long before he was even old enough to get the permit. That means riding shotgun, no sleeping/reading/eating/iPod, paying full attention to the road and anticipating the actions of other drivers. I would ask him whose turn it was at the four-way stops, or to predict whether the car alongside us was actually trying to change lanes at the last minute before a left turn. It gave him a better understanding of the responsibilities of a driver."

"The key is the parents. While [teen driving] laws are strict, our teens know that any infraction will be much more severe at home than with the DMV. Make the house rules scarier than the laws, and implement them and teens pay attention."

"Teens are often reckless because they are rushing to make their curfew at home. After our eldest son got a speeding ticket because he was running late, we changed our teens' curfew from when they had to be home to when they had to leave the friend's house, the dance, etc. ... Our teens have thanked us many times for this one change because they no longer felt rushed."

The Journal's Juggle blog covers work and family issues. Post your thoughts on these and other topics at WSJ.com/TheJuggle.

