

# Addressing Unsafe Driving Behavior: How Parents Can Intervene

Parenting a teen driver can be a challenging experience. While the thrill of their newfound independence can be exciting, it's natural to worry about the potential risks they face on the road. Unfortunately, teens are more prone to engaging in unsafe driving behaviors, which can quickly lead to a wreck or serious collision. As a parent, it's crucial to recognize the signs of risky driving and know how to address these behaviors before they escalate into dangerous situations.

## Recognizing Unsafe Driving Behavior

Teens often lack the experience needed to fully understand the dangers of certain driving behaviors. This inexperience, combined with the [pressures of peer influence](#) and the desire to push boundaries, can lead to habits that put them and others on the road at risk.

Some common unsafe driving behaviors among teens include:

- **Speeding:** Many teens underestimate the risks associated with [speeding](#). They may feel that driving faster makes them more "in control" of the vehicle, but the reality is that speeding reduces reaction times and increases the severity of collisions.
- **Distracted driving:** Texting, talking on the phone, or using social media while driving is a major cause of crashes among teens. Despite the dangers, many teens still engage in these [distractions](#), believing they can multitask effectively.
- **Running red lights or stop signs:** Some teens may develop the habit of "rolling through" stop signs or speeding through yellow lights, not realizing how dangerous these behaviors are.
- **Aggressive driving:** Tailgating, weaving through traffic, or road rage are all signs of [aggressive driving](#), which increases the risk of a wreck. Teens may not fully understand the potential consequences of these actions.

Recognizing these behaviors early on is key to addressing them before they lead to a serious crash. If you notice your teen driving recklessly, speeding, or engaging in distracted driving, it's time to intervene.

## How to Talk to Your Teen About Unsafe Driving

Talking to your teen about their driving behavior can be tricky. No one likes to be told they're doing something wrong, and teens may be defensive or dismissive of your concerns. However, approaching the conversation with care and patience can make all the difference.

First and foremost, remain calm. If you've witnessed unsafe driving firsthand or noticed warning signs, take a moment to collect your thoughts before addressing the issue. Avoid scolding or lecturing your teen, as this will likely cause them to shut down or become resistant to the conversation.

Instead, frame the discussion around your concern for their safety. For example, you might say, "I've noticed that you've been driving a little fast lately, and I'm worried that it could put you in a dangerous situation." This type of language opens the door for a conversation rather than an argument.

It's also important to provide specific examples of the behavior you're concerned about. General statements like "You're not driving safely" can be vague and unhelpful. Instead, point out specific instances, such as "I saw you checking your phone while driving last week, and I want to make sure you understand how dangerous that can be."

This guide can help navigate you through some of these difficult conversations: [FTSDC Safe Driving Guide for Teens and Parents](#)

### **Tools and Resources for Monitoring Behavior**

In today's tech-driven world, there are several tools and resources available to help parents monitor their teen's driving behavior and address issues before they lead to a collision. While you don't want to invade your teen's privacy, these tools can provide valuable insight into how they drive when you're not in the car.

Many insurance companies offer [telematics programs](#) that track driving behaviors like speed, braking, and phone usage. These systems provide feedback on your teen's driving habits and can even offer discounts for safe driving. Some apps allow you to receive real-time alerts if your teen is speeding or driving recklessly.

[Dash cams](#) are another option for monitoring your teen's driving. These cameras record the road and the interior of the vehicle, giving you a clear view of how your teen is behaving behind the wheel. Dash cams can be particularly helpful for identifying distractions, such as phone use or eating while driving.

Some parents also use [driving contracts](#), which set clear expectations for behavior behind the wheel. In the contract, you can outline rules like obeying speed limits, avoiding distractions, and adhering to traffic laws. Both you and your teen sign the contract, and it includes consequences

for breaking the rules. This formal agreement helps establish accountability while promoting safe driving habits.

### **Correcting Behavior Before It Escalates**

Once you've identified unsafe driving behaviors, it's essential to take action to correct them before they escalate into a dangerous situation. The goal is to guide your teen toward safer driving habits, not to punish them unnecessarily. Here are some strategies to help correct risky behaviors:

**1. Practice drives:** Spending more time practicing driving with your teen can help address unsafe habits. During these practice sessions, focus on the specific areas where your teen is struggling, such as speeding or distracted driving. Offer constructive feedback, but be mindful of your tone—your goal is to help, not criticize. Practicing in different driving conditions (like nighttime or inclement weather) can also help build their confidence and competence behind the wheel. Check out this [great resource for keeping track of your practice drives](#)!

**2. Reinforce consequences:** If your teen continues to engage in unsafe driving despite warnings, it's time to enforce the consequences outlined in your driving contract or family rules. Losing driving privileges for a week or more can be an effective way to get their attention. Make sure your teen understands that the consequences are not about punishment but about keeping them safe and preventing future collisions.

**3. Enroll in defensive driving courses:** Sometimes, additional education is the best remedy for unsafe driving habits. Many communities offer defensive driving courses designed to teach teens how to anticipate and react to potential hazards on the road. These courses provide practical skills that can reduce the likelihood of a crash. Consider enrolling your teen in one of these programs to reinforce the importance of safe driving.

### **Maintaining Open Communication**

While addressing unsafe driving behaviors is crucial, [maintaining open communication](#) with your teen throughout their driving journey is just as important. Teens are more likely to follow the rules and drive safely when they feel that their parents trust them and are willing to listen to their concerns.

Encourage your teen to talk to you about their experiences on the road, both good and bad. Ask open-ended questions like, "How do you feel about driving in heavy traffic?" or "What was the most challenging part of your drive today?" This type of conversation shows your teen that you're interested in their perspective and helps build trust.

Additionally, be willing to discuss your own driving experiences and mistakes. Sharing stories about times when you made a poor driving decision or encountered a challenging situation can

help normalize the idea that everyone makes mistakes—and that what matters most is learning from them.

### **Why Addressing Unsafe Driving Behavior Reduces Risk**

Addressing unsafe driving behaviors early on is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of a crash or collision. Teens may not fully grasp the consequences of their actions behind the wheel, which is why parental involvement is so important.

Research has shown that teens whose parents are actively involved in their driving experience are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. [According to the National Safety Council](#), teens with involved parents are 50% less likely to speed, 30% less likely to use a cellphone while driving, and 70% less likely to drink and drive. These statistics underscore the impact parents can have on reducing the risk of dangerous driving and collisions.

By addressing unsafe driving behaviors as soon as you notice them, you can help your teen develop safer habits and prevent future wrecks. Whether through practice drives, driving contracts, or technology, your involvement is key to their success as a responsible driver.

### **Taking Action for Safety**

Addressing unsafe driving behavior isn't always easy, but it's a necessary part of helping your teen become a responsible driver. By recognizing risky behaviors, having open conversations, and using tools like telematics or dash cams, you can intervene before a crash occurs.

Remember, the goal is not to criticize or punish your teen but to guide them toward safer driving habits. With consistent communication, practical feedback, and the right resources, you can help your teen develop the skills they need to stay safe on the road—and reduce the risk of a serious collision.

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