



# CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Education, practice are keys to safe driving

By Jane Sutter

Getting a driver's license is seen as a huge rite of passage in our American culture. In our mobile society, knowing how to drive is an essential tool for many young adults to get to school or jobs.

For a parent, the prospect of their high schooler getting behind the wheel may be a scary one. Teaching their teenager to learn how to drive safely and "watch out for the other guy" may feel like a daunting responsibility. Parents are right to be concerned because motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death for people ages 16-24, according to the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles.

The good news is that there are plenty of resources to help parents and teens. First, parents and their teens will want to educate themselves on New York State requirements for drivers.

According to the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee website, "The Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program is designed to provide time for young people to gain critical experience in various traffic scenarios in a safe and controlled manner. In addition to the learner permit restrictions that apply to everyone, the Graduated License Law places restrictions on drivers under 18 years of age who have a junior learner permit or junior driver license. The restrictions depend on whether you have a junior learner permit or a junior driver license, and where and when you will be driving in New York State."



The state Department of Motor Vehicles has a comprehensive website that outlines the documents a teen will need so they can apply for a junior learner permit. It also offers a link to the New York State Driver's Manual and practice quizzes to help students prepare for the test. The website also explains the requirements for teens to earn their junior driver's license.

Teens who are under 18 must wait at least six months after getting their permit to take a road test to get a license. They must have com-

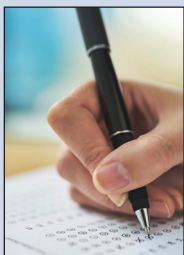
pleted a five-hour pre-licensing course or taken a driver's education course at a high school or college, and they must have 50 hours of supervised practice with at least 15 of those hours after sunset.

### Advantages to driver education programs

For the past 17 years, Peter Wegman has been teaching driver's education at McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester, where he is also a social studies teacher. Students spend 24 hours learning in a classroom setting. Their on-road experience comes with six hours behind the wheel with Wegman and 18 hours in the car observing other students drive with Wegman supervising.

Wegman says it can be advantageous for a teen to take driving lessons in driver's ed or at a private driving school because the teacher can add some value as an unbiased observer who has an ability to break down driving techniques step by step, such as

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### New York State laws

For information on how to get a learner's permit in New York State and to get links to other information about obtaining a driver's license, go to:

<https://dmv.ny.gov/permits>

how to parallel park a car. Parents, on the other hand, may have been driving for at least 20 years, and a lot of what they do behind the wheel is muscle memory.

"Many times I'll ask the teen, do you know what you just did — not in an accusatory way but to give a sense of 'do you know what just unfolded,' and then they'll let me know, and I get to the point where I realize there's a disconnect, and that's where I'll work with the student" and break down the situation.

In order for students to get their 50 hours of supervised driving time when they only get 24 supervised hours in the driver's ed course, they must drive with other adults with NYS driver's licenses – that can be parents, grandparents, or someone at least 21 years old, Wegman noted.

If a teen confides that their parents get nervous when the teen is driving, Wegman will tell them to start a dialogue with the parent and narrate what the teen is seeing. "Now they know what you're seeing and ideally that gives them a frame of reference of where to help you." Wegman shows students a video in which a girl is sharing what she's seeing on the road. "It sounds kind of cheesy but she'll say, 'There's a semi on the road right in front of me.'"

Wegman has heard positive comments from students who tried this approach with their parents. "They say it absolutely does work."

#### **A skill that takes practice**

Early in his instruction with a new group of teens, Wegman says he points out to them that driving is a skill they are developing, just like learning to play a sport or a musical instrument. "At the beginning, a coach or instructor will tell you to do things a certain way because you're going to have a better outcome, despite the fact that doing something else would be easier."

When teens see adults driving poorly, those adults have internalized bad habits, so Wegman points out to the teens that at this stage, they don't want to develop bad habits. He'll ask them questions to get them thinking about what they are doing so they can be better drivers.

He also reminds teens that in New York State, drivers are required to come to a full stop at a stop sign. "Be aware that if Mom or Dad (don't come to a full stop) and an officer sees that, they may not pull them over. But they will pull you over. And if you think they are going to make an example of you, the answer is yes, they are."

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## **Start the conversation with your teen**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration NHTSA urges parents to start a conversation about safety with their teen driver. Let your young driver know that obeying the rules of the road is a prerequisite for the privilege of driving. In 2021, 2,608 people were killed in a crash involving a teen driver (ages 15 to 18). In addition to the tips below, the NHTSA offers more helpful information at <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving>

### **No drinking and driving**

Talk about the fact that it's illegal to drink before you're 21—and that mixing alcohol and driving, or driving under the influence of any drug, is unacceptable at any age. Almost one out of five teen drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

### **Buckle up**

The car doesn't move until everyone is buckled up—front seat or back, on every trip, every time. In 2015, 58 percent of the 531 passengers who died in passenger vehicles driven by teen drivers were not wearing seat belts. When the teen driver was unbuckled, 84 percent of those passengers were also unbuckled.

### **No distractions**

Driving is the first and only task when behind the wheel. That means no phones or texting while driving, and not doing anything else—like eating and drinking or fixing hair and makeup—when you should be 100 percent focused on driving. About 10 percent of all teen drivers involved in fatal crashes were distracted at the time of the crash.

### **No speeding**

Speeding is a critical issue for all drivers, especially for teens who lack the experience to react to changing circumstances around their cars. More speed means less time to react. About one-third of all fatal teen-driver crashes involved speeding. Make sure that your teen knows that the rule is to obey the posted speed limit at all times.

### **Passengers**

Passengers increase a teen's risk of having a fatal crash. That's because other passengers can distract an inexperienced teen driver. Review New York State's graduated driver licensing (GDL) restrictions before your teen takes to the road; these restrictions may prohibit passengers in vehicles with teen drivers and set other rules for safety.

### **Parent-teen agreement**

The National Safety Council's DriveitHOME™ program sends "Pointers for Parents" emails weekly to parents who sign up. It also has a parent-teen agreement called the "New Driver Deal." The document helps parents and teens to set answers to questions such as "When will the car be used?" and "Who will pay for gas and insurance?" These resources are available at <https://www.nsc.org/road/resources/dih/driveithome?>





Classroom instruction includes a mandated section on distracted driving, Wegman said. He asks students to tell him what are things that can lead to distraction.

He points out to them that many cars now have controls right on the steering wheel to change settings for things like heat and air conditioning, the radio, etc. He explains that New York State mandates that cell phone usage be hands free in a car, but that law varies from state to state, and even if a student goes to college in a state where holding a cell phone while driving is allowed, research shows it's safer for the driver to continue the hands-free practice while talking on a cell phone.

Conversations about using drugs and alcohol and driving also are part of the classroom instruction. Wegman said he never assumes that teens are using these substances – not all teens do. He emphasizes to students that the legal age to use alcohol or marijuana is 21 in New York State and driving while impaired is illegal. "I point out that increasingly, Uber is your

friend. Many adults now, rather than drive, will take an Uber."

He also makes sure to tell students that over-the-counter medicines and prescription drugs can make them drowsy and to check the instructions to see if they say not to operate heavy equipment. He tells them: "You want to be mindful of that, and you can always go up to the counter and ask a pharmacist that question and they will help you out. They might recommend you take something else." Wegman also reminds them that marijuana, even if legally obtained, should not be smoked while driving because it is an impairment. "For a long time, there was a belief that it's not the same as drinking and driving, so I have to go through that with them."

Another distraction that Wegman covers in the course is having friends in the car. He tells students that if their friends are distracting them, "Just tell them to knock it off. Nine times out of 10, they're going to stop, especially if you tell them, 'You're being so loud, I can't focus on the road.' None of your

friends have a death wish." And if a teen has a friend who continues obnoxious behavior, Wegman encourages them to tell the friend they will no longer drive them around, as hard as that may be to do.

#### **Road test time**

Finally, Wegman encourages parents to drive with their teen as much as possible. "In order for them to get better as a driver, they need road time to build their confidence. They need to learn how to make right- and left-hand turns, how to keep up with the speed limit."

When the day comes for the teen driver to take his road test, Wegman has one final piece of advice. The teen should drive the car in which he or she has had the most practice, so it's the one they are the most familiar with. "The driving test is stressful enough as it is," so better for the teen to drive the old family car if that's the one in which he's been practicing, rather than a newer, shinier model, Wegman said.

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*Jane Sutter is a freelance writer based in Rochester.*



# 5 FIVE WAYS

to protect your children from sexual abuse

*Parents play the primary role in educating their children about sexual abuse. Here are 5 tips for teaching safety to the little ones God has entrusted to you.*

1

**Keep it practical.** Teach your children the differences between safe touches and unsafe touches.

2

**Tell your children that saying “no” is okay.** Empower your children to say “no” if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or touches them inappropriately.

3

**Give your children a way to alert you.** Tell your children they can use an excuse or share a special “code-word” with you to alert you about an unsafe person or situation.

4

**Tell your children to report an unsafe touch.**

Let your children know they should tell you if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe around any adult or peer. You can also identify other adults they can tell about unsafe touches.

5

**Tell your children you trust them.** If your child makes a report to you, believe him or her. Tell them it is not their fault and that you love them. Immediately bring the allegation to the attention of public authorities.



Promise to Protect

Pledge to Heal



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

## Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:  
Tammy Sylvester,  
Diocesan Coordinator  
of Safe Environment Education  
and Compliance,  
585-328-3228,  
or [Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org](mailto:Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org).

*Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.*

*To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:*

Deborah Housel  
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;  
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,  
ext. 1555  
[victimsassistance@dor.org](mailto:victimsassistance@dor.org).

*All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.*

# ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

## ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

### CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

#### Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>  
*PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.*

#### NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>  
*A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.*

## FOR PARENTS:

#### Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>  
*A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education*

#### Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

#### iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>  
*Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies*

#### Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>  
*Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America*

## LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Bivona Child Advocacy Center**  
(Monroe, Wayne counties):  
[www.BivonaCAC.org](http://www.BivonaCAC.org)  
585-935-7800

**Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:**  
607-737-8449  
[www.chemungcounty.com](http://www.chemungcounty.com)

**Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:**  
315-253-9795  
[www.cacofcayugacounty.org](http://www.cacofcayugacounty.org)

**Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program**  
(Ontario County):  
[www.cacfingerlakes.org](http://www.cacfingerlakes.org)  
315-548-3232

**Darkness to Light organization:**  
[www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)

**STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:**  
[www.sthcs.org](http://www.sthcs.org)  
716-372-8532

**NYS State Central Registry**  
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):  
1-800-342-3720

**NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)**  
866-313-3013

**Tompkins County Advocacy Center:**  
[www.theadvocacycenter.org](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org)  
607-277-3203

**Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:**  
585-786-8846

**Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:**  
315-531-3417, Ext. 6