

MetLife Auto & Home®

Teaching Your Teen to Drive

Without driving each other crazy!



MetLife®



Dear Parent/Guardian,

One of the best ways for you to influence your teen's driving habits is to sit in the copilot seat as your teenager learns to drive. This booklet will give you and your teen a little something extra to work on during those practice sessions. It was written by MetLife Auto & Home and reviewed by the National Highway Traffic Administration to support parents who want to help their teens become safer drivers.

We hope this information helps you in the very important task you are undertaking—making your teenager the kind of driver you want them to be. We at MetLife Auto & Home applaud your efforts and wish you and your teen many happy drives together!

ABOUT THIS BOOK

You might feel better about your teenager driving, if you had some influence over how your teen handles themselves behind the wheel. Chances are good that you're not a certified driving instructor. Chances are also good that you're probably a better role model than most of your teen's friends, who are also just learning to drive. Your influence could make a difference—a difference that could save your teen's life!

Even being an experienced driver, you may find it difficult to break down into pieces the many driving techniques that come so easily to you. This booklet breaks down some of those procedures, so you can more easily explain them to your teen.

One way to ensure sanity during your practice sessions is to try to focus on just one aspect of driving each time you drive together. That's why only one point is highlighted for each chapter. Taking these tips in small doses just may provide a way for you and your teen to really cover some ground.

"Staying Cool as a Copilot" comes first to help get you off to a good start. Then, each section progresses through driving tips, common problems, and what you can do to help your teen's driving habits. You'll also find suggestions for the best places for you to practice each skill. You may even use the tips as springboards to discussion as you and your teen travel down the road to a safer driving future.



STAYING COOL AS A COPILOT

START IN THE RIGHT FRAME OF MIND

Before you begin ...

GET A VIEW FROM THE COPILOT'S SEAT

Those mailboxes aren't quite as close as they seem. But, if you're usually the driver, it could look as though your teen driver is about to run them over.

Remember, the road looks very different from the passenger side. Take a ride in the passenger's seat before experiencing it for the first time with your new driver. This way, you can have a better feel for how the road looks from the passenger's point of view, and you'll have one less surprise when your teen takes the wheel. For example, it can be difficult to tell from the passenger seat if the vehicle is centered in its lane if you usually see the road from the driver's seat.

ACT AS THE "NEW DRIVER"

You play the "new driver" with an experienced driver giving instructions. You might find being told to "turn left," "turn right," "stop here," or "pull in there" can be awkward—and downright annoying! This experience can help you understand what the new driver hears and how they may feel once your practice sessions begin.

STAY ALERT

It's important to stay alert. This probably won't be a problem, since it is a fortunate parent/guardian indeed who can relax while their teenager is driving. Remember, the minute you start to relax can be the minute your teen needs your help. Be comfortable, but be alert.

REMEMBER YOUR GOAL

Make sure you realize that only so much can be taught about driving in a limited amount of time. But, practicing with your teen can pay off in the years to come. By practicing, you can help them make decisions and judgments rather than rely on trial—and quite possibly—error.

FIRST PRACTICE SESSIONS

Try to practice as often as possible, first with sessions of 15-20 minutes. Increase to practice periods lasting an hour, or so, during daylight hours and then at night and during poor weather conditions. Try to remember to take advantage of the opportunity to practice every time you get into the vehicle with your new driver. Take a break, if either you or your teen becomes tired or frustrated. Driving will not improve under tense conditions. It's all part of staying cool behind the wheel!

START IN A PARKING LOT

Empty parking lots are a great place to see if your teen can drive in a straight line forward and backward, start up and drive a short distance, and stop the vehicle smoothly.

Test your teen's ability to turn the wheel and accelerate. Decide on a point in the parking lot to turn right. Make sure they turn without first drifting to the left or cutting the corner. Make a left turn the same way. Then try making a right or left turn after coming to a complete stop.

CHECK POINT

Parking lot activities:

- Start
- Stop
- Left turn from stop
- Right turn from stop

HELPING YOUR NEW DRIVER SEE

Emphasize that looking ahead, to the sides, and behind the vehicle is the key to being in tune with other traffic and in control of the driving situation. Remind your new driver to observe all sides of the vehicle—front, rear, left, and right—as well as keeping an eye on the instruments—to have the information necessary to make good driving decisions.

DOING IT WELL

Try to have your teen look far ahead at all times. Driving in town requires observing up to a block ahead. The ability to glance frequently in both the inside and outside mirrors and look over their shoulder before turning or changing lanes will help your new driver observe behind and to the sides of the vehicle as well as the road ahead.

YOUR ROLE

To improve observation skills, ask your teen to tell you as soon as they notice something, such as a traffic light, stop sign, or intersection. You can also ask your new driver to point out areas where their vision might be restricted, such as hillcrests and blind intersections.

By asking the driver if there is a vehicle following them, you can better understand if they are

aware of what's happening behind the vehicle. You could also quiz your teen to see if they know at what speed they're traveling without first looking at the instrument panel.

COMMON PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

Staring straight ahead for a long time can be a sign that your inexperienced driver is not scanning to the sides or checking the mirrors and instruments enough. Going through intersections without slowing can also mean that they have not been observing properly. Drifting in the lane is another sign that they may not be paying attention.

Try to encourage your new driver not to become mesmerized by the road, but to be prepared to react to everything in the driving path or anything that could cross or end up in that path. Encourage your teen to look beyond the vehicle ahead and notice brake lights in any lane as a sign that traffic is slowing and, therefore, they may have to slow down too. Try to teach your new driver to watch for such things as exhaust, front wheels turned toward the road, a driver behind the wheel, turn signals, and brake lights as a sign that a parked vehicle may pull out suddenly.

KEY LESSON

Remind your new driver to observe all sides of the vehicle—front, rear, left, and right—as well as the instrument panel in order to have all the information necessary to make good decisions.

PLACES TO PRACTICE

Quiet residential streets are the best places to start to practice observing on all sides of the vehicle. Make sure your teen looks out for special hazards such as vehicles that appear to be parked but could pull out unexpectedly, vehicles pulling out of driveways, children playing, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Intersections demand scanning from side to side. As your teen moves on to heavier traffic and higher-speed roads, looking all around the vehicle is critical.

CHECK POINT

Ask your teen ...

- if there is a vehicle behind them.
- how fast they are going.

BEFORE EACH TRIP

MAP YOUR ROUTE

Resist the temptation to just go out and drive around. "Sink or swim" may be fine for some activities, but to make sure your driving sessions go swimmingly, it's best to be prepared. By adding some structure, your teen may benefit more from your driving sessions.

Give careful thought to driving routes a beginner can handle. You may get off to a smoother start and find it easier as you move on to roadways with more traffic. When choosing where to practice, try to take a few moments to think about the route and drive it first yourself to better prepare for any potential difficulties.

Talk about the practice session before you go. Agree on what will be done and how much time you'll spend on the session. In some cases, you might want to drive to the practice session.

CHECK LIST

- Map out your route ahead of time.
- Start with short trips and increase a little at a time.
- Drive alone with your teen.
- End the session, if either of you tires or gets tense.

Ask Yourself...

- Where are we going?
- What can we practice?
- Can my new driver handle it?

FOLLOWING IN TRAFFIC

Emphasize that a safe following distance (how far you are behind the vehicle in front of you) is the key to preventing a collision—even more so than quick reactions and good brakes.

DOING IT WELL

Your teen may find that the two-second rule will help them in maintaining a safe following distance. This means, when following a vehicle, they should keep at least a two-second interval between your vehicle and the vehicle ahead. This works at any speed but only under the best conditions (daytime, dry roads). When driving in adverse weather or road conditions or at night, the following distance should be increased to at least four seconds.

To measure following distance with the two-second rule, have your teen start to count “one thousand one, one thousand two” as the back bumper of the vehicle in front passes a fixed object, such as a signpost. If your vehicle’s front bumper reaches that sign post before the count of “two,” have your teen drop back and increase their following distance. Remember also, the closer they drive to traffic, the harder they’ll find it is to see what’s ahead.

Encourage your driver to look several vehicles ahead. Remind your teen that if any vehicle ahead slows down or stops suddenly, it’s likely that all the vehicles behind will have to do the same. By maintaining a good following distance, your teen will have more time to react to the actions of other drivers.

Remind your teen that there could be vehicles following you. If your new driver keeps an eye on and communicates with the driver trailing you, they can avoid the possibility of being hit from the rear. You might suggest “pumping” the brakes by touching them on and off quickly to flash the brake lights and using turn signals in advance to indicate your teen’s intention to slow down, stop, or turn.

YOUR ROLE

Count out the two-second distance for your teen. As they become more experienced with the two-second distance, ask, “How many seconds are you from the vehicle ahead?” After a while, your new driver may be able to follow at a safe distance without having to count it out every time.

COMMON PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

New drivers sometimes count the seconds too fast and do not anticipate changes in the roadway as quickly as they should. They may concentrate on following so much that they lose sight of pedestrians and other vehicles. They also may tend to follow certain vehicles too closely.

With continued practice, your teenager may realize the need to follow larger vehicles at a greater than two-second distance because of the inability to see around them.

KEY LESSON

When being followed, communicate with the drivers of the vehicles behind you.

THE TWO-SECOND RULE

When following, keep at least a two-second interval between your vehicle and the one ahead. Under adverse conditions, increase this distance to four seconds.

PLACES TO PRACTICE

Choose the right time of day and use an open road with a moderate volume of traffic.

CHECK POINT

- Ask your teen “how many seconds” they are from the vehicle ahead of you.

CONTROLLING SPEED

Most traffic violations are for speeding, and speeding contributes to many traffic accidents. That's why it's very important to try to help a new driver develop skills to make good decisions about the choice of a speed.

DOING IT WELL

Maximum speed limits are set on the basis of ideal driving conditions—good weather, good roads, and good traffic conditions. But it's difficult to find all these conditions at once. That's why a new driver needs to be reminded to constantly adjust their speed as driving conditions change.

CHECK POINT

- Ask your teen to be at a certain speed as they reach a landmark. Make sure your teen understands speed must be changed (slower or faster) if needed during this period.

Adjusting speed to traffic and road conditions can be a bit awkward for an unskilled driver at first. You can help by emphasizing that your new driver should keep pace with the other traffic and maintain the same speed as the other vehicles in the flow of traffic—as long as speed limits are observed.

Try to avoid large groups or “packs” of traffic. Show your teen driver how to do this as well by adjusting speed. Have them slow up a little and let the pack go by and then resume their speed.

Get your new driver to adjust speed as necessary in new places such as unfamiliar intersections, school crossings, or other areas where pedestrians might do something unexpected. Keep in mind that driving 20 mph in some situations may be much too fast (even though the speed limit may be 25 mph).

YOUR ROLE

You can ask your new driver to maintain a constant speed. For example, you can say, “Let's see if you can maintain 35 mph for the next half mile.” Your teen may find the speedometer will drop below or go above 35 mph. This should improve with practice. Have them practice when driving under various road conditions—hills, curves, *etc.*

COMMON PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

Often, new drivers tend to drive too fast through intersections. Try to make your teen realize how dangerous intersections can be—even if they have the right-of-way. At the early driving stage, you may need to make sure your teen is aware of approaching an intersection!

New drivers tend to drive too fast on curves, too. Remind your new driver that a curve is just a small part of a regular turn. It can be hard to understand the need to slow down to enter a curve and to accelerate after leaving the curve. With lots of practice and reminders, this will become easier.

Practice will help your teen anticipate speed changes of the vehicle under different conditions (such as hills). With a little practice, your new driver will be able to adjust the vehicle's speed to the road conditions.

Make sure your teen driver does not make these common driving mistakes:

- driving too fast for road and weather conditions
- slowing down too much when turning off a high speed road that has an exit lane
- losing speed when lane changing
- letting the grade of a hill change their speed—slowing down when going uphill, speeding up when going downhill

KEY LESSON

Set goals for constant speed. Adjust speed to road and weather conditions.

PLACES TO PRACTICE

It's best to drive in easy-to-handle places first. So in early practice sessions, try to get your teen driver to maintain constant speed on streets in residential areas or on two-lane roads with little traffic and few side streets.

As they become more experienced, you can begin to venture into areas where traffic is heavier and where there is a need to adjust speed more often.

You can begin to practice increasing speed and merging onto another road by merging at a little-traveled intersection with a yield sign. Once your teen has mastered that, try it on a higher speed road with a longer acceleration area. Finally, work on speed control while passing or being passed, as well as on hills and curves.



SAFE SPACE AND THE VEHICLE

Spacing, or positioning, calls for keeping a cushion of space around the vehicle and yielding to the space requirements of others. Try to help your teenager learn how much space to leave to the right and left of the vehicle. A new driver will soon find that oncoming, passing, or parked vehicles can take away lateral space—space to the left and right of the vehicle.

DOING IT WELL

Try to help your teenager see that the proper use of space involves positioning the vehicle properly on all sides. Your new driver should soon see that it's necessary to position the vehicle as far away as possible from hazards or potential conflicts without disrupting the traffic flow. Make sure they understand that jumping across the center line just to get past a parked vehicle can create a worse situation. In some instances, the vehicle must be placed between two hazards if the available space is very narrow. After practice, your teen should begin to realize the need to adjust speed constantly to maintain a proper space cushion to the sides.

PARENT'S ROLE

New drivers can be confused when trying to abide by all the different space requirements.

For example, you may find yourself saying, “keep right to avoid oncoming vehicles” and then, “keep left to avoid parked vehicles.” So, what happens if your new driver faces oncoming traffic and parked vehicles at the same time? If the risk is about equal, it may be best to steer a middle course between the oncoming vehicles and the parked vehicles. This may not leave as much of a space cushion as desired, but still enough space to react to sudden moves from either side.

When space is not adequate between hazards, advise your new driver to handle one hazard at a time. Use space to be able to maneuver, change directions, and avoid tight places. For example, on a narrow bridge, rather than meeting an oncoming vehicle, it's best to slow a bit to let the other vehicle go over the bridge first.

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COMMON PROBLEMS

Drifting

New drivers have a tendency to drift toward oncoming vehicles, especially on higher speed multilane roads. That's because they sometimes concentrate so hard on the oncoming vehicle that they fail to check their own vehicle's intended path.

Blind Spots

Make sure your teen understands that driving in the "blind spot" of other vehicles could be very dangerous. You can safely make your teen aware of blind spots while your vehicle is parked. With your teenager in the driver's seat, walk around the vehicle and ask them to tell you when you are not visible in the rearview and side mirrors. As you're driving, you could point out vehicles that might be in the blind spot, as well as when your teen drives in this dangerous position.

Parked Vehicles

Even parked vehicles can present a problem. Inexperienced drivers tend to believe that parked vehicles will always stay parked and often do not leave enough space for them. Encourage your teen to move away from

anything parked and to check for indications that these vehicles might be pulling out by looking, for example, for turned wheels, exhaust coming out the back of the vehicle, a driver behind the wheel, brake lights, turn signals, and doors opening. Remind your new driver that parked vehicles also hide pedestrians who are not good at checking before crossing the road—children who may run out into the road or adults who have other things on their mind.

KEY LESSON

Maintain space on all sides of the vehicle. Handle one hazard at a time. Be aware of blind spots.

PLACES TO PRACTICE

Try to practice use of space with parked vehicles on quiet side streets or in neighborhoods without children playing near the road, then progress to more heavily traveled streets with pedestrians, bicycles, and oncoming vehicles. As you and your teen move on to multilane streets, you can continue to work on keeping a space cushion with vehicles beside you—both moving and parked—and your teen will have a safe foundation and practical experience.

CHECK POINT

- With your teen in the driver's seat, walk around the vehicle and ask them to tell you when you are no longer visible in the rearview and side mirrors.



DECIDING WHEN TO GO

MERGING, YIELDING, AND PASSING

Timing is everything when deciding when to enter, exit, join, or cross traffic. Most of these decisions occur at intersections—whether turning left, turning right, or going straight across the intersection. New drivers have to learn to judge the time or “gaps” between vehicles in order to make safe decisions.

DOING IT WELL

Some drivers, especially new ones, have difficulty judging the time and distance required to make maneuvers in traffic. Besides that, when turning onto a street or going straight across an intersection, it’s important to make sure your teen allows enough room to complete what was started, accelerate to the proper speed, and watch out for pedestrians and stopped vehicles. Merging and changing lanes requires that your new driver think about keeping a good amount of space all around their vehicle. And they must remember to yield to ongoing traffic.

YOUR ROLE

Try to lead your teenager one step at a time through the correct selection of gaps. You can try having them select gaps for you as you drive, telling you whether the gap is safe or not. You might even give your teen a watch to actually time the gaps.

When your teen is driving, have them tell you what gap should be selected before they actually move into that gap. Then you say “yes” or “no” before the move is made. Once you’ve practiced this, your driver should be able to select and move into gaps in all kinds of traffic. Evaluate decisions on the spot and make suggestions as needed. Convince your new driver to avoid taking unnecessary risks, to allow extra room when doing anything for the first time, and above all, to be patient and wait for the best time to go.

Sometimes, a change in direction is needed. For example, if your teen is having trouble turning left across a very busy street, they might turn right and then make a U-turn where it’s safe to do so.

Critical judgments are required for passing, so choose carefully the time to practice this skill. Begin to have your new driver master passing other vehicles on a multilane road before attempting to pass on a two-lane road—which, depending upon traffic patterns in your area,

you may choose not to encourage at all. If possible, have someone else in your family drive another vehicle so your teen can practice passing and being passed.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Uncontrolled intersections or intersections controlled only by yield or stop signs are the most difficult for new drivers. Making a right turn on a red light is another challenge, one that you might simply advise against unless there is no traffic with which to merge. When your inexperienced driver selects a good gap in traffic, make sure they accelerate to a desired speed as soon and as safely as possible.

New drivers have a tendency to slow down when changing lanes, which is exactly the opposite of what they should do. Remind your new driver not to slow down in most lane-change maneuvers. If your teenager is moving too slowly, an acceptable gap may soon become unacceptable. Watch to make sure your teen is not concentrating so much on making the correct gap selection that they forget to watch out for other vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

KEY LESSON

Gap selection is always difficult and a skill that must be practiced.

- Practice on multilane roads.
- Maintain speed when moving into a gap.

PLACES TO PRACTICE

Practice passing on roads with little traffic before attempting to practice selecting gaps in heavier traffic where your teen will find more difficult gap selections, such as changing lanes and passing. You can have your teen select gaps for you when you’re driving so they do not have to follow through on them, then talk about what was correct and what was incorrect about those selections. Gap selection is a skill that must be practiced hundreds of times. Do as much of this practice as possible on side streets before moving into heavier and/or faster traffic.

CHECK POINT

- When you are driving, have your teen verbally select gaps for you to take.
- When your teen is driving, have them tell you which gap they are choosing before taking it.
- Have someone else in your family drive another vehicle, so your teen can practice passing and being passed.

COMMUNICATING ON THE ROAD

Drivers can't rely on words to communicate on the road. New drivers need to learn a new type of communication that relies on signs, signals, and anticipating situations based on what they see in the road. Your teen needs to learn how to make sure other drivers see them and how to let those drivers know what they plan to do.

DOING IT WELL

Practice communicating when changing direction and speed. Make sure your new driver learns to signal before changing lanes, turning corners, and entering and exiting highways. Show them how to use brake lights and hand signals to communicate to others when they want to slow, stop, or park.

YOUR ROLE

As the two of you drive along, try to make an effort to point out when other drivers fail to communicate. Teach your teen that a good rule of thumb for making a turn is to try to signal before using the brakes, so the driver behind will know that they are going to slow down.

Remind your new driver to pay attention to the traffic behind their vehicle. To avoid being hit from the rear, suggest that your teen check the mirrors and pump the brakes before slowing or stopping.

COMMON PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

New drivers can become overly concerned with putting on the signal indicator. Sometimes, they fail to let the vehicle straighten out from a curve or a previous turn before trying to signal for the next turn. Make sure your teenager waits until the vehicle is straight before attempting to signal again.

Beware of new drivers risking loss of steering control when trying to use the signal lever. Have your teen practice using it without taking their eyes off the road or hands off the steering wheel. This can also hold true for operating other instruments in the vehicle while driving, especially in heavy traffic. You may need to remind your new driver to wait to tune the



radio or use other instruments while in an intersection—and wait for a more calm section of roadway.

KEY LESSON

Make sure other drivers can see your vehicle, and let other drivers know what you plan to do.

PLACES TO PRACTICE

Communicating can be practiced on any type of road. Actually, by reminding your new driver to signal for every turn in a quiet neighborhood, signaling can become almost automatic later on in heavy traffic. With good signaling skills, your teen can spend more time focused on other important driving decisions.



CHECK POINT

- Have your teen try to signal before using the brake lights, so the driver behind will know they are going to slow down.
- To avoid being hit from the rear, suggest your teen check the mirrors and pump the brakes before slowing or stopping.
- Remind your teen to avoid signaling too early. If there are driveways or entrances to shopping areas before a turn, have them use the turn signal only when it will not confuse other drivers.

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