

Teenage Driving

Vehicle choice is particularly important for young drivers.

If your teenager has just gotten a driver's license, chances are he or she is looking forward to driving to school this fall. It may be hard to imagine handing them keys to your brand new car, but that may be the smartest vehicle to choose.

While getting a driver's license is an exciting rite of passage for teens, it can be enough to make a parent frantic. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and the Insurance Information Institute (III) say there's something worried parents can do to protect their teens - choose a safe vehicle.

Teenagers should drive vehicles that reduce their chances of a crash and offer state-of-the-art protection in case they do crash. The first years teenagers spend as drivers are very risky. In fact, teen drivers have the highest death rates of any age group. In 1997 alone, more than 5,700 teenagers died in motor vehicle crashes, and many more were left severely and permanently injured by crashes.

Teen drivers not only lack experience, for many of them immature behavior, such as speeding and reckless driving, is common. They may drive cautiously when mom or dad is in the car, but when they're on their own or with other teens, bad driving is often the norm. Keep this in mind when you decide which vehicle your teen will drive and avoid vehicles that encourage reckless driving.

Avoid choosing vehicles with a performance image. Sports cars and other vehicles with performance features, such as turbocharging, are likely to encourage speeding. Choosing a vehicle with a more sedate image reduces the chances your teen will be in a speed-related crash.

Don't let your teen drive an unstable vehicle. Sport utility vehicles, especially the smaller ones, are inherently less stable than cars because of their higher centers of gravity. Abrupt steering maneuvers - the kind that can occur when teens are fooling around or overcorrecting a driver error - can cause rollovers in these less stable vehicles. A more stable car would, at worst, skid or spin out.

Even if your teenager drives a car with a sedate image, chances are still high that sooner or later he or she will be in a wreck. This is why it's also important to pick a vehicle that offers good crash protection.

Don't let your teen drive a small vehicle. Small vehicles offer much less protection in crashes than larger cars. However, this doesn't mean you should put your child in the largest vehicle you can find. Many mid and full size cars offer more than adequate crash protection. Check out the safety ratings for mid size and larger cars.

Most of today's cars are better designed for crash protection than cars of 6 to 10 years ago. So avoid older vehicles. For example, a newer mid size car with airbags would be a better choice than an older, larger car without airbags. Before you make a final choice on the car your teenager will drive, take advantage of the wealth of consumer information available on car safety from the US Department of Transportation, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, and Insurance Information Institute. Check it out; it just may save your teen's life.

For further information, consult the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](http://www.iihs.org/) (<http://www.iihs.org/>) or the [Insurance Information Institute](http://www.iii.org/) (<http://www.iii.org/>) web sites.