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PARENTING THE TEENAGE DRIVER:

A MODEL CONTRACT

Introduction

More teenagers die due to motor vehicle accidents than any other single cause. Apart from the risk of death is the risk of injury to the teen driver, passengers, and others. Driving can also become a financial burden to the family, a burden which can become a crisis in the event of an accident

- Motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) are the **leading cause of death** in people age 16 to 20. MVAs account for about 1/3 of deaths of people in this age group.
- People aged 16 to 20 have the **highest fatality rate** due to MVAs of any other age group.
- People aged 16 to 20 make up only 5% of drivers and only 3% of all miles driven by all drivers. And yet they are involved in 15% of traffic deaths.
- About 5000 teenagers of driving age **die in automobile accidents** every year.
- For every teenager killed, about 100 have injuries that are not fatal. MVAs are the leading cause of disability related to **head and spinal cord injuries**.
- 17-year old drivers are 6 times as likely to have an MVA as are people in the general population of drivers.
- 16-year old drivers are 20 times as likely to have an MVA.

Guidelines for use

Why do a driving contract?

- 🚗 Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in young people
- 🚗 Teenagers, as a group, are less experienced, more impulsive, less developed judges of situations.
- 🚗 Your teenage driver is in danger of killing or maiming himself or herself or other innocent people.
- 🚗 If you don't do a contract, you will likely be vague in your rules and directions about driving.
- 🚗 The contract signals the teenager that driving is a serious and potentially deadly activity.

The first step in this process is important and often the most difficult. It is that you reflect carefully on the problem and firmly resolve to do all you can reasonably do to prevent driving-related disasters from happening.

Establish with the teenager, in advance, your firm determination to reach an agreement prior to their driving. You must be willing to state (and mean) that you **will not allow the teen to drive until an agreement is reached and signed**. State this...and then be willing to ride out the storm of teenage protest.

Use this agreement as a starting point and revise it for you and your teenager. You **should** make changes to personalize this agreement!

If possible, if two parents are involved, parents should reach an agreement about the contract before it discussed with the teenager.

DO NOT ALLOW A TEENAGER TO DRIVE INDEPENDENTLY UNTIL THE AGREEMENT IS NEGOTIATED, WRITTEN, REVISED, AND SIGNED! DON'T LET YOUR TEEN DRIVE WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT. HANG TOUGH!! It may be wise to negotiate some of the details of some of the points. If your teen makes a reasonable counteroffer, consider it. **BUT INSIST ON AN AGREEMENT IN WRITING.**

Sign it and provide a copy to the teenager. Set a date to revise it after a period of time during which the teen drives. Schedule the review date and put it on the calendar. On this review date, go through it and change the agreement a little (or a lot) based on experience. Make it stricter if the teen's behavior with the car warrants that. Make it a bit more lenient, perhaps, if the teen is doing well. **START WITH A FAIRLY STRICT CONTRACT.** Model Contract begins below:

Driving Agreement

General Principles

Initial each point to show you read and understand it:

___ I recognize that driving is a privilege, not a right. The State's role is to determine that I meet the *basic* legal requirements for a license. The privilege to drive is not a legal right: It is granted to me by my parents, who are under no obligation to do so, and who may withdraw the privilege at any time. Because I am a minor, my parents remain responsible for my behavior. I understand that I will only be allowed to drive when I am willing to abide by the rules and regulations established by my parents.

I recognize that driving a car is a very serious matter. I recognize that...

___ Automobile accidents are the **leading cause of death** of people 16-20 years old.

___ I am **more likely to die** in an auto accident than from any other cause.

___ Recklessness or errors that I make while driving **could kill or hurt me**, kill or hurt passengers in my car, and/or kill or hurt people in other cars and pedestrians. Among those that could be victims of my driving mistakes are: babies, children, my friends, my family members, parents of children, and many others.

___ I will abide by laws regulating driving. I will observe and abide by posted speed limits. I will abide by rules established by my parents. I recognize these are for my protection and the protection of others.

___ I understand that the car I drive is property of my parents, even if I pay for part or all of it, even if it is given to me as a "gift." I drive the car only with permission.

___ I understand that my parents and I must be able to reach a written agreement in order for me to be permitted to drive. I understand that the terms of this agreement may be changed based on how I handle the freedom and responsibility of driving. The rules will get stricter if my parents judge that I am not doing well. It will get somewhat less strict if my parents judge that I am doing well.

____ We will review this agreement and perhaps make changes to it on _____(date) or earlier if my parents or I wish to do so.

RULES-Category A

Category A rules, if violated, will lead to indefinite suspension of driving privileges.

1. I will not drive for 24 hours after my last use of alcohol in ANY amount. (This is **not** an endorsement of use of alcohol.)
2. I will not drive for 72 hours after my last use of any "substance." In this agreement, "substance" means any drug or chemical (including but not limited to marijuana, pills, inhalants, and other drugs) that would be expected by my parents to alter my ability to drive. There is no acceptable amount of any substance of this kind. If I use any drugs, I will not drive for 72 hours.
3. I will not ride as a passenger with any driver who has used alcohol or any substance as defined above.
4. If I find myself in a situation as described in 1,2,or 3 above, I will contact my parents or another designated adult to arrange for transportation.
5. I will not engage in any thrill-seeking behavior while driving. I will not drive for recreation. Driving too fast or playing around with a car for fun is NOT ALLOWED.
6. I will not allow alcohol or illegal drugs in the car.
7. I will inform my parents about any and all accidents and encounters with police.

RULES-Category B

Category B violations will lead to suspension of driving privileges for up to three months.

1. I will ask permission to drive to specific locations and will discuss the route planned. As I begin driving independently, I will be certain that my parents know where I am. I will not make unscheduled stops or side trips.
2. I will not drive on streets, highways, or in areas that are designated as off-limits. I understand that greater flexibility in these matters will come as I gain experience and show that I am honoring the agreement. For the time being, the following roads and areas are to be avoided:
3. I must ask permission to drive each time I drive. Exceptions to this rule will be given for regularly scheduled transportation to school, work, regular meetings, etc.

4. I will not permit any other person to drive the car.
5. I will limit the number of passengers (not counting parents) to _____ (recommended: 1 or 2 for new drivers).

RULES-CATEGORY C

Category C violations may lead to suspension of driving privileges for up to six weeks.

1. I will respect weather and road conditions, slowing down as needed for safety. I will contact my parents to discuss weather or poor road conditions when I am out driving.
2. Knowing that judgment and driving skills are altered by emotions, I will not drive when I am upset or angry. Under these conditions, I will contact my parents for transportation and I reserve the right to maintain my privacy regarding personal matters.
3. It is my responsibility to protect the car I drive. I will keep it reasonably clean and maintained. I have some specific responsibilities regarding the maintenance of the car as noted below:
4. I will not allow my passengers to behave in such a way as to damage the car or distract me while driving.
5. I will wear my seatbelt and shoulder harness at all times and require all passengers to wear them.
6. When transporting my friends, I will be reasonably sure that they have their parents' permission to ride with me.
7. I will not allow smoking in the car.
8. I will not eat while driving.
9. For the first two months I drive, I will not have the car stereo on.
10. I will not use beepers, cell phones, or operate car stereos while driving. When I am allowed to use it, I will only adjust the volume of the stereo while driving. I will pull over for other operations of beepers, cell phones, and electronic equipment.
11. Accidents are more likely to happen when I rush. I am more likely to rush when I leave late. Therefore, my parents reserve the right to not allow me to drive unless I leave by a time they specify. For example, if my parents tell me that I must allow 20 minutes to get to something that starts at 7:00, I may not leave later than that.

SPECIAL ITEMS:

1. Tickets and moving violations will result in suspension of my driving privileges for a period to be determined by my parents.
2. My parents have no obligation to pay my fines for driving-related tickets.

3. I will make certain financial contributions to the purchase of the car, maintenance of the car, and/or insurance. My contributions are currently as follows:
4. I will agree to provide transportation to family members at the directive of my parents. Fulfilling these obligations is a condition of my use of a car. Sometimes these responsibilities will override my own desires and interests in using the car.
5. I agree that I must be responsible to drive safely and that my parents must believe I am relatively responsible in order to allow me to drive. They may, therefore, take into account how I handle my general responsibilities, including schoolwork, employment, household duties. I will also maintain a respectful attitude. I will not ask my parents to allow me to drive when I am rude and disrespectful to them or to others.
6. My parents have a right to expect me to be responsible. I have a right to be told what this means. For this reason, I may ask my parents for clarification of their requirement that I "be responsible."

Summary: I agree to abide by the rules in this contract and I accept the consequences and penalties if I do not. I recognize my parents' authority in deciding if I may drive. That authority is final until I am an adult living independent of them.

Signatures

DRIVER _____ (date)

PARENT(s)/Guardian(s) _____ (date)

PARENT(s)/Guardian(s) _____ (date)