

Safety Centre

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Driving and your Teen – an 8 Step Guide for Parents



#DriveSafer



Learning to drive is a rite of passage; a sacred experience between parent and teen. Helping your son or daughter on their journey doesn't have to be stressful and can, in fact, actually help build a bond between you.

We've compiled our top 8 steps to help create a positive experience for you both and ensure that your child always aims to #drivesafer.

1. Finding an instructor

While parents still play a big part in teaching their teens how to drive, the law requires a person to build up at least 12 hours of official lessons before they can apply for their full licence.

Driving instruction in Ireland has been a regulated industry since 30th April 2009. This system monitors the standard of instructors, the examinations they must pass and the penalties imposed for breaches of the law.

All driving instructors must be on the Road Safety Authority's (RSA) Register of Approved Driving Instructors (ADI) and should also display an ADI permit. To be awarded one of these permits, the instructor undergoes garda vetting and is assessed by the RSA on:

- Rules of the road and road safety.
- Driving ability.
- Ability to teach.

There are more than 1,500 ADI instructors across the country, all of which can be found on the RSA Register.

2. You as the sponsor or supervisor

The RSA call the experienced driver who practices with a learner the Sponsor. You are not expected to be a driving instructor; you are there to guide your teen and supervise him or her in a safe environment. You will need to lead by example; be calm and patient and be aware that your role is as a support to the approved driving instructor.

3. Be familiar with the facts and legal requirements

Some 2013 statistics from the RSA:

- 190 people lost their lives on Irish roads.
- There was a high incident of "no seatbelt" as a factor in fatal collisions (1 in 5).
- Driver fatigue contributes to 1 in 5 deaths in Ireland.
- You are 4 times more likely to crash if you use a mobile phone when driving.
- Half of drivers killed were aged 16-35.

Legal Requirements

Learner permit while practising

- Holders of a learner permit are not allowed to be alone in the vehicle when driving and the person accompanying them must hold a full driving licence for the category of vehicle they are driving for a continuous period of 2 years.
- A learner's vehicle must display their L-plates front and rear. The plates should consist of a red 'L' on a white background.
- Learner drivers are not allowed to drive on motorways.

Novice plates for when they pass the test

- Anyone granted a first full driving licence on or after 1st August 2014 must display N-plates on their vehicle for a period of 2 years. Failure to do this is punishable by a fine not exceeding €1000 for a first offence and 2 penalty points on payment or 4 on conviction.
- Holders of N plates have a lower threshold of 7 penalty points leading to disqualification during their learner and novice periods.

4. Guidance for your practice drives

Rather than just hopping in the car with your learner driver, it's important to do some preparation before the teaching begins.

- Plan the route beforehand and drive it yourself to ensure it's suitable for a beginner driver.
- Schedule the time and location of the practice session just as you would any other important meeting or activity.
- Use the same car in each practice session.
- Avoid talking on your phone, texting, browsing e-mail, reading a book, or any other activity that suggests you are not fully involved in the guided-practice session.
- Start with 15 to 20 minute sessions and work up to an hour or more; however if your teen shows signs of fear or stress, quit for the day.
- Work through the checklist provided at the back.
- Give your teen two or three practice trials on each new manoeuvre and then allow them to do it without your guidance.
- You can allow your teen to drive when you are shopping or picking up the children.

Common complaints from teen drivers about their parental teachers

- Not making practice time a priority by putting it off or not practicing at all.
- Allowing other passengers in the car during practice driving sessions.
- Providing no feedback, so the teen doesn't know if he/she is doing well.
- Conducting practice driving sessions in places where their friends will see them.

- Failing to listen to the teen driver.
- Mocking or making jokes out of the teen driver's mistakes.
- Raising your voice or tensing up when the your son or daughter attempts a manoeuvre or makes a mistake.

Communicating with your teen

- Stay calm and maintain your sense of humour, but don't laugh at the silly mistakes your teen will no doubt make.
- Keep track of smaller mistakes and bring them up after the practice driving session. Constantly pointing out errors will just make him or her nervous and more likely to make more mistakes.
- If a mistake is made that is dangerous or critical, pull over as soon as possible to talk about what went wrong. Address the issue clearly in a calm voice and avoid shouting or gasping.
- Don't give the beginner too much instruction at once. Planning the route in advance allows you to give smaller instructions at regular intervals to get to your destination.

5. Instilling safe habits

Car safety

- The driver and each passenger are required to wear seat belts.
- Mobile phones and other devices should be switched off while driving.
- Limit passengers in the vehicle when your teen is driving. Extra passengers, especially friends and siblings, can be a distraction and can cause the young driver to take unnecessary risks.
- Adopt a zero tolerance policy for alcohol and drugs and here's why...

The dangers of drink-driving

The European Commission estimates that at least a quarter of road deaths can be attributed to alcohol, while the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates the role of alcohol in road deaths is even greater.

All drivers are affected by drinking even small amounts of alcohol. Alcohol affects judgement, vision, co-ordination, and reaction time. It causes serious driving errors, such as:

- Failing to stop at stop signs and red lights.
- Increased reaction time to hazards.
- Driving too fast or too slow.
- Driving in the wrong lane.
- Running over the kerb.

- Weaving.
- Not signalling, failure to use headlights.
- Straddling lanes.
- Running stop signs and red lights.
- Improper overtaking.
- Difficulty seeing signs, pedestrians and cyclists due to the reduced quality of peripheral vision.

Preventing driver fatigue

While it's obviously important to focus on your teen's driving skills, it's also essential that you monitor their overall well-being. Between school, homework, part-time jobs and hobbies, teens are often over-worked and lacking sleep.

- Discuss the dangers of driver fatigue, especially around high activity times, such as during exams or matches.
- Be sure that your teen is well rested and focused before he/she gets behind the wheel. You can even suggest a 'power nap' before a long practice driving session.
- Highlight the importance of being well-rested in general and make sure you're allowing adequate sleep time to be a priority in your family's life.

6. Overcoming challenges

Make sure you're prepared for the most common unsafe driving practices associated with new drivers.

- Lack of scanning to detect and respond to hazards.
- Not accurately judging the distance from other objects.
- Driving too close to parked cars or other obstacles on their left.
- Tendency to drift toward oncoming cars.
- Gripping the steering wheel too tightly, making it difficult to steer.
- Turning entire upper body to check a blind spot, rather than just glancing over their shoulder.
- Driving too fast approaching intersections, on bends, or for current weather and road conditions.
- Inability to recognise or react to unsafe driving by others.
- Slowing down too much when changing lanes, or when merging into traffic.
- Forgetting which way the wheels are turned when pulling out of a parking space.
- Failing to look both ways before moving forward on a green light.

Once your teen has had some proper driving experience, they may feel overconfident, so make sure to highlight the basics, as well as safe driving practices throughout your sessions.

7. Pre-trip inspection and preparation

- Check the driveway or street for obstacles, children and other pedestrians.
- Inspect the headlights, tail lights, windows and windshield, and make sure they are clean.
- Make sure the tyres are inflated and note which way the wheels are turned.
- Check under the vehicle for fluid leaks.
- Check windows. Clean and defrost them if necessary.
- Check for packages or other objects that could pose a hazard in the event of a quick stop. Discuss alternatives for safely securing all loose cargo.
- Adjust seat, steering wheel and head restraint, along with inside and outside mirrors per instructions below.
- Fasten seat belt and make sure all passengers do likewise.
- Make sure all doors are locked.
- Adjust air vents, windows and/or temperature controls.
- Switch off all mobile devices.
- After starting the engine, check for warning lights on the dashboard.

Proper Mirror Adjustment

Driver-side mirror

- From the driver's seat, lean your head toward the driver-side window until it just touches the glass. Adjust the mirror until you see just beyond the side of your car.
- You should not see the side of your car, but rather the space that would be the traffic lane to the right of the vehicle.

Passenger-side mirror

- Lean as far over to the centre of the car as you can. Adjust the passenger-side mirror until you see just beyond the side of your car.
- Again, you should not see side of your car, but rather the space that would be the traffic lane to the left of the vehicle.

Rear-view mirror

- Adjust so you can see behind you.

8. Key skills to practice in lead-up to test

Make sure that your teen practices these key skills in the lead-up to their driving test.

Starting

- Be sure the way is clear.
- Check mirrors and over the shoulder for traffic.

- Signal, if necessary.
- Move foot from brake to accelerator and press gently.
- Except when turning, keep hands in the 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock positions.

New drivers will often grip the steering wheel too tightly which makes it difficult to correctly steer the vehicle.

Braking

- Braking the car should be a smooth manoeuvre and not a jerky motion. Avoid slamming on the brakes unless there is an emergency.
- Always brake with your right foot.

Parking

Parking will not be included in the driving test but it is an essential part of becoming a safe driver.

When pulling into a parking space, make sure your teen follows these tips:

- If possible, look for a pull-through parking space that allows an exit by going forwards rather than reversing.
- Signal and pull up until you can see into the space.
- Continue moving forward until the front of the car is almost touching the kerb, is close to the wall, or is even with other cars in the row.

When reversing out of a parking space:

- Reverse out slowly to make sure other vehicles and pedestrians can see the vehicle. Oncoming traffic has the right of way.
- Turn the wheels only after the car clears other cars or obstacles.

New drivers will often forget which way the wheels are turned when pulling out of a parking space so be mindful of this.

Turning Right

Have your new driver master right turns before moving on to left turns. Teach your teen to:

- Use the right turn signal about 100 feet before the turn or intersection.
- Make sure the vehicle is in the proper lane.
- Check traffic in all directions.
- Slow down appropriately (or stop, if it's required) before making the turn.
- Yield to other vehicles if there is the possibility of a collision.
- Always stop for pedestrians.

- Always use both hands in a hand-over-hand motion for all turns. Then, return both hand to the wheel.

Starting and stopping on an uphill grade

Be sure to give your new driver plenty of practice at this before trying it in traffic. Teach your teen not to accelerate quickly from a stop on an uphill grade – it can make the tyres spin.

Reversing the vehicle

Be sure to tell your new driver to reverse the vehicle only when absolutely necessary. When the need arises, he or she should:

- Confirm that it's clear behind the vehicle (by getting out and checking, if necessary).
- Get help from someone outside the vehicle if mirrors don't give a good view
- Use the left hand on top of the steering wheel.
- Look backwards (checking the front at times if the vehicle needs to clear obstacles there).
- Move the top of the steering wheel in the direction the vehicle should go (if turning).
- Go slowly.

Good luck

We hope that this guide helps you to create positive experience for you and your teen and we wish your son or daughter the best of luck in their driving test.

Remember to take time to continue to drive with your teen from time to time to make sure skills remain up to speed even after he or she has obtained their licence. Be confident that you are doing your part to develop a focused, safe, competent new driver.

Tracking progress checklist

Before progressing to a moving vehicle, have your new driver locate interior controls. If you find he or she needs work with any of the items on the list, continue to practice together.

Completed	Needs work	Interior controls
		seatbelts
		speedometer
		odometer
		fuel gauge
		headlights (running lights)
		headlights (low beams)
		headlights (high beams)
		directionals (turn signals)
		hazard lights
		dimmer switch
		horn
		ignition
		gear shift
		accelerator pedal
		brake pedal
		clutch pedal (if applicable)
		emergency brake
		rearview mirrors
		windshield wipers/washers
		sun visors
		heater/defroster/air conditioner
		airbag(s)
		driver's seat adjuster
		steering wheel tilt (if applicable)
		window controls
		radio controls
		door locks

Completed	Needs Work	Starting and stopping
		starts smoothly
		stops smoothly
		keeps speed consistent
		checks mirrors (left, right and rearview)
		checks to see blind spots

Turning (run through this list for right and left turns)

		signals at least 100 feet before turn
		checks for traffic in all directions
		watches for pedestrians
		enters turning lane (if available)
		makes turn at proper speed
		yields to oncoming traffic

Reversing

		checks the area before moving the vehicle
		watches behind while backing
		maintains slow speed

Starting and stopping on an uphill grade

		keeps the vehicle from rolling backward
		uses proper acceleration from a stop to keep tyres from spinning

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