

Complacency and Boredom

The fact is we spend hours each week in our cars, sometimes hours each day! It's easy for all of us to become complacent with respect to our activities while driving. We want to stay connected. Sometimes boredom plays a role as well.

We can be the change we want to see in our young drivers by realizing that they will pick up their habits from us. The good news is that they see the healthy habits as well as distracting ones. They will notice if we have them make a call or send a text when they are passengers. You can make a positive difference.

Common (and dangerous) distractions for teen drivers

- Teen passengers
- Texting
- Adjusting radio (MP3, iPod etc.)
- Cell phone use
- Eating
- Grooming
- Friends (outside of the vehicle)
- Thinking about cell phone use
- Mechanical problems with vehicle
- Maps and GPS devices
- Reaching for objects
- Did we mention texting and cell phones?

For additional information please visit our dedicated traffic safety Web site at

www.octrafficsafety.com

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Partners in Traffic Safety

HOW DO YOU SPELL...



Tips for parents of teen drivers...and everyone else

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Distractions. We hear about them all the time. But how do they really effect our driving? One thing is for certain, there are no positive distractions. Some have more adverse influence than others, but it's always better when we drive with fewer distractions. The following information provides drivers (and parents of young drivers) with information about both laws and best practices when it comes to reducing distracted driving.

Distractions and new drivers

We all know that driving requires us to multitask more than almost anything we do each day. We must scan the roadway, while steering the vehicle and operating the pedals. Then there are signs, signals and other roadway markings we must obey. As mature drivers we may take for granted all of these tasks since we have been doing them for years. Yet for inexperienced drivers this can quickly become an overwhelming task, especially if distractions are present.

Provisional Driver License to the Rescue

Studies from all over the country recognized patterns with respect to teen drivers and distractions. This is why many states, including California, have enacted restrictions for new drivers under the age of 18 years old. These restrictions limit distractions caused by young passengers, one of the leading factors that raise not only crash risk, but specifically fatal crash risk.

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Provisional License Laws

Currently in California drivers under the age of 18 cannot transport passengers under the age of 20 years old unless accompanied by a licensed driver 25 years of age or older for the first year they hold a driver license. There are limited exceptions for immediate family members only, typically siblings. These exemptions include medical reasons, school and other situations where, “reasonable accommodations cannot be made.” No matter what your teen tells you the exemption is only for family members. Please check the California DMV Web site or other sources to review the entire law.

Teens and Mobile Devices

A teen without a cell phone is like a Southern California freeway without traffic...you don't see either very often. However placing that cell phone using teen in a car, on that busy highway, puts everyone at risk. This is why California law prohibits any driver under the age of 18 years of age to use any type of cell phone while driving. This applies to the use of hands free devices, hand held and texting.

Parents are encouraged to check up on their teens regarding this very important law. Place restrictions on their cell phone use while driving and monitor their behavior. Most importantly follow through on consequences if your teen violates your rules.

Other Teen Distractions

In addition to passengers and cell phones, there are plenty of other distractions for young drivers. Many car radios have over two dozen buttons and knobs and allow for various types of portable music devices to be attached. Be sure to discuss these risks with your new driver and consider your options.

Discourage eating, grooming and other dangerous interferences as well. Although most parents assume that teens learn these behaviors from their peers, most young drivers report that they are modeling behavior they see from adults.

What is the worst distraction?

A study of driving behaviors where cameras were placed looking both inside and outside of vehicles identified many causes of distractions in crashes and near crashes. What was the most notorious act? Reaching for a moving object inside a vehicle raised the crash / near crash frequency nearly eight times.

We may not think we do this often (fortunately we don't!) but what about the tipping soda bottle, cup of coffee or baby bottle? Loose papers, maps and other items often cause us to suddenly divert our attention, often at the worst time. Make sure cargo in your vehicle is secure before you start every trip.

What about Cell Phones and Adults?

In California adults are allowed to drive and use a cell phone with a hands free device. Does this mean it's safe? Most studies now indicate that there is little if any advantage of using hands free compared to hand held phones.

Why is this so? Cell phone conversations cause our mind to be busy. Unlike talking to a passenger in your vehicle, the person on the other end of the phone does not notice when you are entering a complex driving situation. Passengers tend to modulate their level of conversation based on the immediate driving situation. They can also act as an extra set of eyes.

The fact is that we are all more distracted than we think when we are talking on cell phones while driving. If you are talking on your cell phone while driving consider telling the person on the other end that you will call them back before you reach complex areas such as school zones, interchanges and high traffic areas.

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Adults and Texting

California law prohibits anyone, of any age, from texting while driving. The risks of this behavior are just too extreme to allow anyone to text while operating a vehicle. The average amount of time people look down at their phone while texting exceeds four seconds. In this amount of time you will travel over the length of a football field at highway speeds.