Beyond the Law: Setting Stricter Limits for Your Teen Driver

Research shows motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of teen deaths. Tragically, 3,490 teenage drivers (between the ages of 15-20) died in car accidents in 2006 alone, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).

The IIHS, along with other driving safety groups, has spent decades studying teen vehicle fatalities to determine what specific behaviors put teenage drivers in the danger zone. Their research reveals that driving at night, driving with passengers, receiving a learner’s permit before the age of 16 and getting a full license before the age of 18 put teens at a much higher risk of having an accident.

Unfortunately, state laws have failed to keep pace with the latest research. Many critics say states simply aren’t doing enough to protect teens on the road. That’s why the IIHS is imploring parents to step up and set stricter driving limits for their teen drivers.

If you want to keep your teenager safe on the road, consider the following advice the IIHS has to offer:

Make them wait

According to the IIHS, 16-year-olds have the highest rate of car crashes than drivers of any age. Sadly, many of these accidents prove to be fatal. This is why the institute strongly encourages parents to wait until their child turns 16 before allowing them to get a learner’s permit and until 17 to get a driver’s license.

Once the teen receives their learner’s permit, the IIHS says parents should put their teen through a learner stage that lasts at least six months. Parents should supervise a minimum of 30-50 hours of their teen’s driving before allowing them to get a full license.

After the teen earns their driver’s license, the institute says parents should restrict their teen’s driving until he or she is at least 18 years old. Specifically, teens should not drive at night and be limited to just one or no non-adult passengers.

Restrict night driving

Once your teen has earned his license, it’s crucial to restrict him from driving at night until he is at least 18. A 2003 IIHS report shows that driving between the hours of 9 p.m. and 5:59 a.m. triples a 16-year-old’s risk of having a fatal car crash.

Not only is it harder to drive in the dark because of low visibility, but teens are typically more tired at night. Driver fatigue is a major contributing factor when it comes to night-time teen crashes. Of course, the chance of teenagers consuming alcohol also increases as soon as the sun sets. According to the NHTSA, 31 percent of teen drivers killed in 2006 had been drinking.

Limit teen passengers

More than half of all deaths in crashes of 16 and 17-year old drivers occur when passengers under the age of 20 are in the car with no adult supervision. When a teen driver has a teen passenger in the car, they are twice as likely to have a fatal crash, according to IIHS. When a teen has three or more teenage passengers, their risk of a fatal crash is three times higher than if they had no passengers.
Of course, it’s no surprise why this is the case: passengers often cause distractions for teen drivers. However, researchers also believe that teens often “show off” for their teenage passengers by speeding and making riskier choices on the road.

Don’t let state laws dictate the driving limits for your teenager. The research shows that state legislation is simply too lenient for most teenagers. As soon as your child is old enough to understand, start preparing him or her for your unique household driving rules. If you make the idea of “no driver’s license until you’re 17” a family mantra, your teen will be prepared for it when the time comes.

Of course, if you tell your 15-year-old she’ll have to wait until she’s 17 to get a full driver’s license, you’ll probably meet some serious resistance. You’ll also have to listen to endless complaints when you tell your teen he can’t drive at night and is not allowed to have passengers. While it’s never fun to play the “bad guy” or upset your teen, it will be well worth it in the long run. Stick to your guns—after all, it could save your child’s life.

For more information on teen driving safety, visit www.iihs.org.