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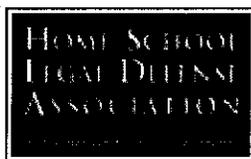
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Parent Taught Driver's Education Saves Lives

By Christopher J. Klicka

Maybe your son just turned 15. He cannot wait to drive. Although you are not too confident he will be ready to drive anytime soon, you know it is too difficult to delay his driving until he is 18.

Or your daughter is already 16 and you are thinking how wonderful it will be to have her do some errands for you so you can spend less time as the family chauffeur.

Perhaps you heard about a recent major accident where two young drivers were badly injured and one was killed. Apparently, the inexperienced driver became distracted and lost control of the vehicle. These are the types of stories you have heard many times before in the news.

A father in your church bemoans the fact that his daughter recently crashed the family car for the second time. Fortunately, only the car was damaged, and no one was hurt. But his insurance rates are going up and his car is in the shop again.

Deep down you are worried about your children. You know young inexperienced drivers are dangerous. The statistics demonstrate teenagers cause a large portion of accidents.

If children who take public school or commercial driver courses are causing all of these accidents, what can you do differently to better train your children how to drive?

How about doing it yourself? After all, you teach your children in all other subjects. You and your spouse taught them how to walk, talk, read, write, figure, research, be self disciplined, and do chores. Why not teach your children how to drive?

Driver's Education: Traditional Programs Are Failing

Although all 50 states have laws regarding driver's education, statistics demonstrate the current methods are not working. More 16-year old drivers are dying in vehicle crashes than ever before, even though the number of traffic deaths has declined among the driving populace in general. In 2002, 5,933 teenagers died in the United States from motor vehicle crash injuries. Such injuries are by far the leading public health problem for young people 13-19 years old. The crash risk is particularly high during the first years in which teenagers are eligible for driver's licenses. Thirty six percent of all deaths of 16-19 year olds are related to motor vehicles.

The problem is worse in the United States than in many other countries because we allow teenagers to get drivers licenses and cars at an earlier age than in most other countries, and little driving experience is required before these licenses are issued. Licenses are also inexpensive and easy to obtain.

In Germany, for example, not only must a student be 18 to obtain a license, driver training costs over \$1500!

In America, the risk of crash involvement per mile driven among drivers 16-19 years old is four times the risk among older drivers. Risk is highest at ages 16 and 17. In fact, the crash rate per mile driven is almost three times as high among 16 year olds as it is among 18-19 year olds.

Crashes involving young people typically are single vehicle crashes, primarily run off the road crashes that involve driver

error and/or speeding.

A study on driver education conducted by George Mason University in Virginia sheds light on the reasons why teenagers are susceptible to driving mishaps:

Teens, on their part, view driving as a right rather than a privilege. Overwhelmingly, study participants cited teen drivers' inexperience as well as their feeling of invincibility and willingness to take risks as contributing factors in unsafe driving behaviors. Participants also noted that teen drivers are easily distracted and lack the skills and judgment necessary to recover from unexpected incidents.

Certified Driver's Education Does Not Ensure Results

Many states require driver's education to be administered through the local public school or a "state certified" commercial driving school. Shouldn't parents have the choice to teach their children how to drive safely? After all, it is parents who are responsible for the well-being and safety of their children.

There is no statistical correlation between driving instruction taught by certified teachers and lower crash rates. In fact, the Young Drivers Video, produced by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and paid for in part by State Farm, tells the viewing audience not to depend on traditional driver education and training. One of the experts interviewed on the training video, Dr. Herb Simpson, simply declares that traditional drivers education programs "have little or no value."

The Solution: Parent Taught Driver's Education

Parental involvement is the answer. I am convinced the best way to be involved in your teenager's driving instruction is to do it yourself.

HSLDA has talked to thousands of parents who despaired over the academic decline in the public schools. They turned to homeschooling to prevent their child from becoming a victim of academic failure. All the statistics show home schooling students all over the country continue to excel academically. Why do home school children on the average score higher than the national average on national achievement tests? Because parents teach them one on one, know their strengths and weaknesses best, love them more, and are willing to sacrifice what it takes to provide them a good education.

Teaching our own children how to drive is merely an extension of this philosophy. It is an opportunity to apply the same principles involved in successful home schooling. But you can add one important ingredient and incentive: in driver training, your children's lives are at stake.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety believes that parent directed driver's education is a reasonable alternative for families in lieu of state licensed drivers education programs. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety conducted a study in 1985 of 52,304 public high school licensed and unlicensed students from 75 schools in seven different states. They found that, "the most important teaching sources were fathers, mothers and school courses." Sixty six percent of the high school drivers reported their fathers contributed some or a lot and 56% reported similar contributions from their mothers.

As of August of 2004, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's Status Report advised Americans that traditional driver education does not provide the intended benefits of producing a safer driver. This report suggests that the way to lower crash potential is to gradually release young drivers as they demonstrate maturity and skill, while simultaneously using parents to train and monitor them during this process. Therefore, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety recommends that new drivers be trained through what they call *Graduated Driver Licensing*—a systematic process that controls progression to unrestricted driving. The new driver initially receives a restricted license and graduates to an unrestricted license through time and increased experience. Graduated licensing laws have been adopted in 47 states and usually include such restrictions as curfews, limits on the number of teen passengers, requirements involving parental supervision, and zero tolerance for teen alcohol use.

Parent-taught driver education programs, like the National Driver Training Institute (NDTI) of Colorado Springs, take the process a step further by initiating the controlled progression during the driver education process through an entirely parent-taught program. Rather than relying on the state to oversee the young driver's progress, the parents assess the teen's maturity, attitude, and experience to determine the conditions under which he may drive. Many of the largest insurance companies across the country have recognized NDTI's parent-taught driver education program, "*Help for the Teenager Who Wants to Drive.*" Many states have formally approved or certified the program.

In October of 2000, students at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs conducted a research project on the effectiveness of parent taught driver training.

The statistics showed that parent taught driver training saves lives!

For example, according to insurance company statistics, out of every 100 teen drivers:

- 37 will be ticketed for speeding,
- 28 will be involved in accidents,
- 13 will be injured in an automobile accident,
- 4 will be ticketed for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and
- 1 will be killed in an automobile accident.

On the other hand, according to the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs survey, for every 100 students using NDTI's parent taught driver education program:

- 8 were ticketed for speeding,
- 8 were involved in accidents,
- 6 were injured in automobile accidents,
- 1 was ticketed for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and
- there were NO fatalities.

In the 1940s and 50s, parents were the primary teachers of their own children in driver's education programs. Later in the 1960s and 70s, the focus shifted to school-taught driver's education. This shift was made in the hopes of assisting teenagers in driving tests and in gaining important driving skills. However, the statistics clearly demonstrate that this has not improved teenage driving safety.

A study of issues affecting young drivers, released in December 2000 by George Mason University's Center for Advancement of Public Health and the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, **identified parental involvement as the most important factor in teaching teens safe driving behaviors.** The study, which is entitled *Young Drivers: A Study of Policies and Practices*, used data gathered through interviews with state and national experts as well as focus groups held with parents, teens, and driver education instructors. The study reports that teens develop driving habits based on their parents as role models.

However, the study notes that in teaching teens to drive, parents often rely on the information and techniques with which they are familiar and unknowingly pass on outdated and sometimes erroneous information. While driver education provides a comprehensive overview for first time drivers, **the curriculum is most effective when parents get involved in behind the wheel practice sessions** with young drivers. Parents are often unaware that young drivers need far more practical experience behind the wheel than the driver's education curriculum is able to provide. (The study is available on the George Mason University website at www.safety.gmu.edu or may be requested by calling 703- 993 3697.)

How Do Parent Taught Driver Education Courses Work?

The reports above show that an added benefit of parent taught driver's education is that, in addition to teaching their children to drive, parents have now completed an 80 hour brush up course. Parents who have signed affidavits of completion for their students have stated often that they have learned much from teaching their children how to drive and that their driving skills been enhanced as well.

Some programs simply send you a curriculum, videos, and tapes providing systematic parent-taught driver education.

Others require the student and parents to track their progress and accomplishments through each lesson. The NDTI program, for example, consists of seven levels. Each level has two parts. Part one is always classroom and part two is always behind the wheel. This is a concurrent program and the student must complete both classroom and the behind the wheel at each level with at least a 90% score before proceeding to the next level. Both the student and the parent must sign off at each level before being allowed by NDTI to graduate to the next level. Each student and parent has access to a 10-hour per day technical support team. Once the student has completed NDTI's program and the technical support team has reviewed and approved all lessons, NDTI issues a completion certificate to be used with insurance companies. Often insurance companies offer driver education discounts on completion of the program.

When considering parent-taught driver education programs always consider the thoroughness of the program, whether it is recognized in your state, and whether your insurance company will give you a driver's education discount.

The Need For Legislation Allowing Parent Directed Driver's Training

In May 1997, the state law in Texas was amended to allow for parent-taught driver's education programs. This change in state law put parents in the center of the training process. In early January of 1998, the Texas Board of Insurance reviewed this process and recommended its inclusion in the same category of training discounts as traditional methods. An insurance discount on premiums will encourage parents to seek this form of training, while reducing loss on the part of the insurance industry when they insure these more thoroughly trained drivers.

Additionally, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Virginia have passed similar legislation recognizing the ability of parents to provide their student's driver's education. The Departments of Motor Vehicles or Departments of Education in several other states have approved various parent taught driver education programs. The following states have specifically approved NDTI's parent-taught driver's education course: Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia.

Many more states do not require any specific requirements for driver education, leaving parents free to choose between commercial driver education schools, public schools, or parent-taught driver education courses. As of June 2003 these states are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Information sources at the end of this article can be checked to find out the laws in your state.

Regarding public school driver education programs, homeschoolers sometimes have difficulty accessing these classes and they do not include much parental involvement. However, driver education classes through the public school or commercial schools could always be supplemented by parent-taught driver education programs to ensure your child becomes the best and safest driver he or she can be. Our children's lives are precious.

HSLDA is working to help expand parental choice in the area of parent taught driver education. We urge you to be prepared to help pass parent taught driver education in your state or help preserve it if it has already been enacted. HSLDA believes that there are several reasons why the state legislatures should pass parent directed driver's training legislation:

1. It encourages parents to participate with the child in learning and to take more responsibility for the outcome. A parent typically has the greatest interest in the safety and well being of the child. Parents do not want their children to harm themselves or cause accidents. Since parents care the most about their children and have the most to lose in the form of higher insurance rates and repairs to vehicles, parents take the time to teach their children well.
2. From the research we reviewed, there appears to be no statistical evidence in support of the claim that certified state mandated programs reduce crash rates. Parents with a good curriculum can provide a graduated form of instruction allowing for more time behind the wheel.
3. Allowing parents to teach their own children to drive provides them an alternative to public and commercial driving schools. It is cost effective, convenient, and allows for a more gradual approach to learning new skills.
4. If certified instruction does not produce safer drivers, why should the government mandate it? Such mandates conflict with the fundamental right of parents to direct the education of their children.
5. The reason for the effectiveness of parent taught driver education is the same as the reason for the effectiveness of home education in general. Both utilize the tutorial method with a low student teacher ratio and individualized

instruction aimed at mastery.

Let's personally help our teenagers learn how to drive and as a result, maybe save their lives.

For More Information

For more information on the National Driver Training Institute's parent taught driver education program, call 1 800 942 2050, write P.O. Box 63179, Colorado Springs, CO 80962, or visit their web site at www.usdrivertraining.com.

For a complete summary of the driver education laws in all 50 states, visit http://www.highwaysafety.org/safety_facts/state_laws/grad_license.htm.

Visit Home School Legal Defense Association's website to join the effort to pass parent taught driver education legislation in more states. www.hslda.org

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