

Friends with Licenses: A Parent-Teen Contract About Riding in Cars With Friends

Dale Wisely, Ph.D.

www.parentingteendrivers.com

INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS

When friends of our children start obtaining licenses to drive, we are faced with tough decisions about allowing our children to ride with new drivers. Here are some grim facts.

- The most common cause, by far, of death among young people is motor vehicle accidents.
- About 6000 American teenagers die every year in these accidents.
- In 2004, **62% of the teenagers who died in auto accidents as passengers, died in a vehicle driven by a teenager driver.**

If your child dies during the teenage years, the most likely cause will be an auto accident.

What kind of rules should we make about our teenagers riding in cars with friends? Our recommendation is to make some tough ones.

Here are some things to take into account.

1. How experienced is the driver the child wants to ride with? Teenagers, as a group, are more dangerous drivers than are adults. (Some of this is inexperience—it is unclear exactly how much is due to age.) The younger they are and the more inexperienced they are, the more likely they'll have accidents. **The first weeks and months of driving are the most dangerous for a new driver.**

2. Is this teenage driver ready for a passenger? *The presence of passengers, and the number of passengers, is one of the most serious risk factors regarding teen-driving accidents.* This has been shown consistently in several studies as an extremely strong effect. The risk of a crash goes up dramatically with the addition of each passenger in the car.

3. How well do you know the teenage driver your child wants to ride with? You may know your children's' friends well, but you don't know what kind of driver he or she is. Good kids, even great kids, can be very unsafe drivers, particularly in the first months of driving.

Some general guidance follows.

1. Don't allow your child to ride with a teenage driver until that teenager has had his or her license for *at least 3 to 6 months*. Remember, the less experience driving, the more risky.

2. Require the driver to come into your home and speak to you before your child rides with him and after. (I'm just going to use male pronouns here.) Before your child leaves with the driver, look the driver in the eye and call him by name. Tell this young driver that you are entrusting the life of your child to him and you expect him to drive carefully. Turn to your child and tell your child that his or her job is to help the driver focus and drive safely. Tell your child that your child must NOT distract the driver.

3. Do a written contract. Why do a contract?

- If you don't do a contract about when and with whom your child may ride, you will likely be vague in your rules and directions about this.
- If you don't do a contract, you can count on a lot of subsequent problems based on "I thought you said..." or "I thought you meant..."
- The contract signals the teenager that driving, and riding with new drivers, is a serious and potentially deadly activity.

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Use this contract as a model. Feel free to edit it and personalize it to your situation. Much of the decision-making you must make about what to put into the contract relates to your overall practices and philosophy as a parent. This contract is intended only as a model to get you started. I've highlighted areas that definitely need addressing, but I highly recommend you read the whole contract and make changes you are comfortable with.

Sign the contract you end up with and provide a copy to the teenager, and require their signature. **EITHER READ THE CONTRACT ALOUD TO YOUR TEENAGER OR, BETTER, REQUIRE THE TEEN TO READ IT TO YOU.**

Schedule a date to revise the contract, perhaps a few months in the future. Rules that will make perfect sense you're your teen is 14 will not seem as reasonable when they are 16. 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.

Riding Agreement

General Principles

The teenager must initial each point to show it is read and understood it:

I recognize that riding in cars, especially with young drivers, is an extremely 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.

___ Although I may not agree, I understand that my parents are restricting my ability to ride in cars with other young people.

___ I must study and be aware of the terms of this contract. "Forgetting" any part of the contract is not an excuse.

THE RULES

- **I may not ride with any driver who has had their license less than _____ months.**

Exceptions

- i. Driver(s) _____.
- ii. Circumstances (*Example: Riding to and from school only.*)
- iii.

- **For other situations, I must ask permission every time I ride with any driver other than my parents.**
- **I will learn in advance how many passengers will be in the car and I will inform my parents of who the passengers are to be and I will inform them of any unexpected changes in the passengers.**
- **My parents reserve the right to speak directly and in-person to any driver before I ride with that driver and to speak directly and in-person to that driver when they bring me home.**
- **No riding with others who have used alcohol or drugs.** I will not ride as a passenger with any driver who has recently used alcohol or any drug. I will not ride with any one who it would be reasonable to think may have recently used alcohol or drugs.

Alternatives to riding with others who have used alcohol or drugs. If I find myself in a situation as described above, I will contact my parents or another designated adult to arrange for transportation. I understand that my parents will appreciate that behavior and will make every effort to avoid asking me a lot of questions about it.

- **No alcohol or drugs in car.** I will not ride with alcohol or illegal drugs in the car. This includes smoking cigarettes. This includes over the counter medications (cough medicines, etc.) when I have reason to believe someone has them in their possession for purposes of abuse. My parents will hold me responsible for any alcohol or drugs in the car, even if they don't belong to me or it is the fault of someone else in the car.
- **No thrill-seeking/stunts/speeding.** I will not ride in a vehicle in which any thrill-seeking behavior is occurring. Riding in cars in which the driver is driving too fast, racing of all kinds, and any kind of "stunt" involving a car is NOT ALLOWED. Riding is for transportation ONLY.
- **No riding without seatbelts. No riding on laps. No riding in the back of pickup trucks.** This includes ANY driving of **any distance** with more passengers than the vehicle is designed to carry. I will wear my seatbelt and shoulder harness at all times.
- **Informing parents about accidents & police encounters.** I will inform my parents about any and all tickets, accidents, and encounters with police (including warnings) that happen when I am riding with someone.
- **No firearms** or other weapons. I will not ride in a car with any guns or other weapons in the vehicle.

No riding in a car without seatbelts on and with extra passengers (sitting on laps, etc.) This includes ANY driving any distance with more passengers than the vehicle is designed to carry.

- **Passenger behavior.** I will not allow my passengers to behave in such a way as to damage the car or distract me while driving.
- **Distracting the Driver.** I will not do things while riding that distracts the driver from the road.

- **TEXTING, CELL PHONES, MP3 Players, GPS System.** I will not ride in a car in which the driver is using cell phones, MP3 players, or any other electronic device while driving.

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

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 this matter. That authority is final until I am an adult living independent of my parents.

Signatures

SUMMARY OF RULES for RIDING

- Permission every time.
- Parents to know the names of all passengers.
- No alcohol, drugs, smoking, weapons.
- No stunts or thrill-seeking.
- Everyone has and wears seatbelts.
- No horsing around and distracting.
- No texting, etc. Driver may not be using handheld electronic devices or mess with stereo.

TEENAGER _____

PARENT(s)/Guardian(s) _____

Date: _____

Rev. 12/2007

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