

Tips for Creating a Safe Driver Contract with your Teenage Driver

If your teenager is on the verge of getting their driver's license, you're probably questioning how you should talk about driver's safety with them. You also might be thinking of how to explain all of the many risks they will face and how to reduce them. You're most likely also asking yourself if you'll ever get a good night's rest again once their license, and your car keys, hit their hands!

Responsible teen drivers equipped with a complete awareness of risks of the road, and visions of sleep filled nights, do not have to be a fantasy if you and your teen work together to create a *Safe Driver Contract*. A Safe Driving Contract is an arrangement that you create with your teen to ensure they acknowledge and respect the significance of responsible driving and the repercussions they will face if they do not stick to the agreed upon conditions of your contract. A Safe Driver Contract also helps your teen remember that using the car is a privilege, and not a right.

Establishing your Safe Driving Contract

There are several steps you and your teen should take when creating your Safe Driver Contract. These steps include:

- Come up with fair terms to your contract. This could be punishment for receiving a driving violation or your expectations for your teen driver as far as filling up the gas tank and curfew while driving your car.
- Develop consequences for not adhering to the terms of your contract for both parties. You will also need to be held accountable as an example to your teen. Accepting that you have consequences for breaching the terms of the contract shows that this is a document you take seriously, and so should they.
- All people in authority should be prepared to enforce the contract with your teen. This includes both parents, grandparents, step-parents, etc. This contract is meant to keep your teenage driver safe, and you can only assume that the people who take a hand in raising your teen will want to abide by your Safe Driving Contract.

Let's take an in depth look at each of these steps:

Fair Contract Terms

The objective of your contract is to ensure your teen driver is a safe driver. Below are examples or terms you could include in your contract:

I agree...

- Safety will be my first priority at all times
- To adhere to the posted speed limit at all times
- That I do not know everything. Safe driving comes with experience which I do not have, but Mom and Dad do. I will follow my parent's advice without a debate.

- I will not allow anyone else behind the wheel of my car. I will also not drive anyone else's car without permission.
- That I will allow only 2 passengers in my car at a time. The higher the number of passengers, the higher risk for distraction, and a distracted driver is not a safe driver
- To remember that I am responsible for the safety of all passengers in my car at all times while driving.
- Everyone in my car must wear their seatbelts at all times while we're driving, NO EXCEPTIONS.
- NEVER to use my mobile phone while driving. My phone will stay in my bag, pocket, or glove box at all times. There will never be a text or phone call that is more important than mine or my friend's life.
- To be a courteous driver and not yell, argue, or display any type of "road rage".
- To not eat while driving and to throw away any trash left in my car. In an accident or when coming to a sudden stop, any trash in my car can become a projectile causing an unnecessary hazard.
- To keep the radio volume at a conservative level. I will ensure the radio is not distracting and I can hear all other vehicles, emergency sirens, or pedestrians I may not always see but could hear if the radio was at a lower volume.
- To NEVER consume alcoholic beverages or medications that can cause drowsiness and then drive. I will ALWAYS call my parents if I become unable to drive. My life is more important than avoiding a lecture about underage drinking.

Consequences for Breaching the Safe Driver Contract

Your agreement will only work if there are repercussions for breaking the terms of the Safe Driver Contract. Some infractions will require more severe consequences than the damages associated with an accident or other insurable event. When an action does not cause an accident or damages, they may need punishment that will always aware that injuries are not the only consequence and they've gotten away with nothing.

When thinking about the consequences you will include in your contract, you should consider what your teen values most (freedom and the car) and the irresponsible behavior they've shown (while free and in the car). Unfortunately, this is not a situation where one consequence fits every crime. The severity of the punishment will have to match the severity of the incident or incidents. While all of your agreed terms are meant to save your teen's life while driving, having the radio too loud or 3 passengers in the car instead of 2 could be considered a lesser offense than speeding or texting while driving.

Include your teen in the contract writing process so they have ownership in their behavior while behind the wheel. You may be surprised at what they come up with.

Enforcing your Safe Driver Contract

The hardest part of having a Safe Driving Contract will be to enforce the terms and consequences when the time comes. Your new driver has school and work responsibilities that,

without the use of a car, will create a need for you to adjust your schedule to make sure they meet these obligations while on punishment. You have to be ready to take whatever steps necessary to put in force the terms of the contract at any time. Without commitment on your part, your new driver will have no incentive to follow the contract as written.

A safe driving contract should not be made an empty threat or a means to control, it can be a very useful educational tool to teach your teen driver about responsibility and the all too real risk associated with driving.