

License to Drive

KICK-START WITH ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

Teens get more verbal jabs about being first-time drivers than they do on just about any other adolescent milestone. This Family Experience is your opportunity to pour your confidence into them and give them wisdom to succeed as a driver.

It's wise to set gradual driving privileges involving where they may drive and how many passengers are allowed in their car. Don't be afraid to set incremental goals that should be met before more privileges or responsibilities are given.

FRAMING UP OUR PURPOSE

Although driving does not necessarily seem like a spiritual activity, it is crucial to teach our teens that driving is one place where either the fruit of our faith shows up...or it doesn't. As you plan this Family Experience, find ways to "drive" home the idea that driving is one of the first big tests of our trustworthiness and integrity.

New freedoms still call for trust in lessons that were learned throughout childhood.

"My son, keep your father's commandment, and don't forsake your mother's teaching."

--Proverbs 6:20

The incredibly fun part of being a first-time driver is the immediate freedom it offers. As you witness your 16-year-old's excitement, try to enjoy it with them. But also remind them that as parents, you have clear expectations about speed, car maintenance, and how many passengers are allowed in the vehicle. How they drive and incorporate your instructions will, in some way, demonstrate their level of trustworthiness. Remind them that this is a tremendous

opportunity for them to show respect for your teaching and obedience to your wishes when they are out of your sight.

Driving reveals a picture of our true selves.

"He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much. He who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much." --Luke 16:10

Driving is a strong test of integrity. Not only is it a time for your teen to show they can do what they have been instructed to do, but it is also a strong indicator of whether or not they will do what they say they're going to do. Try to include spiritual connections to the idea that in their driving, they should be going where they say they will go. Be sure that they are really driving phone-free and text-free and be sure that they see the importance of following even the 25 MPH speed limits in neighborhoods. Guide them in understanding how integrity (or lack of it) in this endeavor will shape your ability to trust them in bigger things in the future.

Foolishness is less painful if we recognize it before something bad happens.

“A wise man fears, and shuns evil, but the fool is hot headed and reckless.” --Proverbs 14:16

Teens are at a place in life where their knowledge is growing by leaps and bounds, and their level of impulsivity is probably at an all-time high. It’s the reason adults look back on something they did at 16 and say with disdain for themselves, “That was REALLY dumb!” But teens don’t like the word foolish being attributed to them. However, much of the information they are taking in at school is compartmentalized away from their short-sighted ability to see consequences ahead of time. The message that something they are about to do is really dumb or foolish does not typically get to the processing area of their brain until something bad happens as a result of an impulsive action. So go into your teen’s driving season with a wisdom/ foolishness index in mind. Evaluate how well they are able to connect quick decisions with natural consequences. Help them see any patterns of recklessness in other areas of their life and challenge correction in those areas before you turn them loose with the keys to the car.

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IDEAS FOR ADDING DEPTH TO THE LICENSE TO DRIVE

When you celebrate your teen’s obtaining their driver’s license, let older friends and family jot a note to them, finishing the sentence, “The most important thing I learned when I first started driving was...” or “The stupidest thing I did my first year of driving was...” There will be some funny and some poignant stories--all of which will reinforce to your teen that we identify with this new freedom they have gained.

Write a Driver’s Blessing or have someone help you write it.

Know which parent is most stressed out in the front passenger seat during the driving permit season. That parent should NOT be the primary driving instructor in the family! If you are the only option in your house, but teaching your teen to drive sends you over the edge, and you are nervous or overly critical when they are driving, try to find a trusted adult who is willing to teach and guide your teen without overreacting.

Encourage your teen to recognize and evaluate driving issues they see with other cars on the road. It can help in troubleshooting their own mistakes.

9TH GRADE: HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE DRIVING CONTRACT

This is not about driving.

That might surprise you, but it is the truth. This experience with your teenager signifies way more than just driving.

There is a shift in your relationship, where your teenager will spend much more time away from you than with you. When they drive a car, they experience their first significant amount of freedom.

That freedom also represents the first opportunity for you to gauge their moral compass. How will they handle making their own decisions apart from you?

- Will they be smart?
- Will they be safe?
- Will they fail miserably?
- Will they surprise you?

This Driving Contract is not about driving; it is about establishing a system for your teenager to both build trust and restore broken trust with you.

What your teenager wants more than anything is freedom. What you want more than anything is for them to be trustworthy. Therefore, if they earn your trust, you are unleashed to reward them with freedom.

This Driving Contract will give you the opportunity to do three very important things:

Teach your teenager how to safely operate a car

Communicate clearly to your teenager, so as to avoid confusion, about what your expectations for them are while driving

Establish a system to strengthen your relationship with them through both building and restoring trust.

You should see this conversation about driving as nothing more than a huge ramp to a greater conversation (i.e. What is our plan for slowly giving to you the freedom of a young adult? What is our plan for restoring trust when it is broken?).

You are giving them more than a set of keys; you are giving them your trust. Don't miss this parenting opportunity that the Driving Contract offers.



Here are some very practical thoughts to set you up for success with the Driving Contract:

- Communicate to your teenager that this Driving Contract is mainly about establishing an opportunity to build trust and restore broken trust during the driving adventure.
- Completing a Driving Contract with your teenager will not magically prevent your teenager from making a mistake while driving, but it will create crystal clear communication and outline a plan for restoring broken trust.
- Blank spots are provided in the contract for you to add any expectations that you would like. Other potential expectations you might choose to add are: a statement that says parents, not the teenager, are owners of the car; a statement about whether or not you will allow your teenager to drive with passengers; a statement about "racing" or reckless driving; a statement about how loud to play the radio; a statement about eating while driving; or a statement about driving when they are emotional or upset.
- The portion of the contract that deals with consequences is left blank on purpose. If this is truly going to be a two-sided conversation, you should let your teenager be a part of the process of deciding consequences. You ultimately decide what they will be, but your teenager will be more likely to honor them if they helped to come up with them.
- We suggest that you do not allow siblings or others to be a part of this Family Experience, so that there is less distraction and more focus on your new driver.
- Display the Driving Contract in the house and give a copy to the teenager for them to keep.
- Make sure to follow up and communicate when trust is restored.
- If at all possible, make sure both parents are a part of this contract. If parents are separated or divorced, it would be a huge "win" if they were able to work together to complete this contract with their teenager. It would communicate a lot of security to the teenager as well.
- You might want to review, revise, and resign this Driving Contract each year around your teenager's birthday to make sure that it remains relevant and builds clear communication, which is the purpose.
- Share with your teenager that the leading cause of death among teenagers is auto accidents. It accounts for over 1/3 of all teen deaths each year. Therefore, it is extremely important that they take safety seriously.



What's Going on With Your 9th Grader?

The 9th grade year signals the beginning of the high school experience and the last stage of the adolescent journey. This is a look into the world of your 9th grader.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- There is a heightened sensitivity to appearance and its social value.
- Boys and girls have a propensity to diet.
- Upper body strength begins to develop in boys.
- Boys and girls level out in height.
- Girls have fully developed physically into their adult bodies.
- Boys have more of a growth spurt to continue.
- Sexual desire is awakened, and the temptation to be sexually active is common.
- They have a need to develop exercise routines and healthy habits.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The 9th grader may:

- Have a desire for more control over aspects of their life
- Have a more evident “adult” personality
- Have an idealistic viewpoint of the world at large
- Love to try new things in an effort to discover identity
- Obtain a strong sense of accomplishment from being involved in various activities
- Be easily “bored”
- Exhibit impulsive behavior with friends and peers
- Not respond to adult lectures, feeling they know better what is going on than the adult does
- Become better at setting and achieving goals



RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Less time may be spent with family, while more time may be spent with peers.
- Competition with outside groups is preferred over competition with friends.
- Relationships with parents become focused on a negotiation to get what they want.
- There is a strong desire for conformity with peers.
- Girls have a tendency to be interested in older boys.
- Popular peers, adults, and celebrities are strong influences.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Their capacity for self-discipline increases.
- Summer camps and mission experiences influence them spiritually because of the peer connections that those events create.
- They begin to imagine what life would be like as an adult away from their parents, and they begin deciding whether or not their faith will be a part of that.
- The ability to fully process abstract thoughts gives them the ability to engage God personally.
- Rather than being told what to believe, they need spiritual leaders to ask their opinions and let them develop their beliefs.
- Their interest and commitment to faith change rapidly back and forth, signaling an internal struggle on whether or not to accept it.