Parents need to talk to kids about traffic safety early and often – <u>before</u> they reach driving age.

Before your teenager begins driving, it is recommended that you set safety rules and then clearly outline the consequences of breaking the rules. Remind your teenager that driving is a privilege - a privilege they will lose if they don't drive by your rules. Getting through to your teen can be tough, but research tells us that teens listen to their parents, and that you influence your kid's driving habits.

Set the standard. Teach safe driving behavior from the beginning.

As the parent, you can start by modeling safe driving behavior anytime you drive your kids anywhere, even before they begin to drive. Talk to your teen about safety issues and the rules you are setting. Explain each one of your rules and the consequences for breaking it. Write up a contract with your teen driver to make sure they drive by the rules and drive as safely as possible. Include the most important issues and spell out the rules.

<u>Rule No. 1</u>: Absolutely No Alcohol

Youths and Alcohol. Teen drivers (ages 15-20) are at far greater risk of death in crashes where alcohol was present than the rest of us, even though they cannot legally purchase or possess alcohol.

These are staggering statistics. In 2007, almost one-third of teen drivers who were killed in crashes had a positive BAC of .01 or higher at the time of the crash, even though it is illegal in all states for anyone under the age of 21 to drive with any trace of alcohol in their system.

On average over the last five years, one-fourth of the deaths in motor vehicle traffic crashes occurred when a teen driver had a BAC of .01 or higher.

The consequences are grim. If your teenager is lucky enough to survive a crash, they will have to face the consequences of breaking the law. That includes a trip to jail, the loss of their driver's license, and dozens of other expenses including attorney fees, court costs, and other fines. They will also stand to lose academic eligibility, college acceptance, scholarship awards, and more.

<u>Rule No. 2</u>: Always Buckle Up!

Youths and Seat Belt Use. Teens buckle up far less frequently than adults do. The very first thing you can do is set the right example for your children by buckling yourself up every time you get in the car.

When your teen is ready to drive, remind them that whether they are driving across town or just around the neighborhood, wearing seat belts is the absolute best way to protect themselves and their passengers from severe injury or even death in the event of a crash.

Wearing a seat belt is free, but not wearing it could cost a life. Despite efforts aimed at increasing belt use among teens, observed seat belt use among teens and young adults (16 to 24 years old) stood at 76 percent in 2006 – the lowest of any age group.

In 2007 alone, 4,540 teenagers aged 16 to 20 years old were killed in motor vehicle crashes, and more than half (2,502) were not wearing their seat belts at the time of the crash. We don't know what the outcome would have been for those 2,502 teens had they buckled up, but statistics tell us that in that same year, 72 percent of the passenger vehicle occupants involved in fatal crashes who *were* wearing their seat belts survived the crash.

Most of the deaths in crashes involving young drivers are the young drivers themselves and their passengers

<u>Rule No. 3</u>: No Talking on the Cell Phone or Texting While Driving

Youths and Cell Phones. Talking on a cell phone while driving slows down the reaction time of even the most experienced driver. Can you imagine the impact it will have on your teenager? And texting while

driving is a serious risk for teen drivers as well, forcing them to take their eyes and at least one hand off the steering wheel.

Distracted drivers can kill or be killed. Driving distractions like talking on a cell phone or texting while driving are an even greater threat for teens than for others. In 2006, among drivers 15 and older involved in fatal crashes, 15- to 17-year olds had the highest percentage of distracted drivers.

Talk to your teen drivers about the risks of talking, texting, and other distractions, and set clear expectations about driving habits.

Rule No. 4: Have the Car in the Driveway by 10 p.m.

Youths and Nighttime Driving. Talk to your teen driver about when you expect them to have the car back in the driveway. The reason for setting a "home-by" rule is to protect your kids by keeping them from driving during the high-risk nighttime hours.

In 2006, 75 percent of all fatal nighttime crashes involving 16 year-old drivers happened between 6 pm and midnight.

Rule No. 5: No More Than One Passenger in the Car at all Times (or Zero if your state's GDL law doesn't permit any)

Youths and Passengers. Most teens are susceptible to peer pressure, which can lead to risk-taking. In a survey completed by the Allstate Foundation, almost half of the teens polled said they had been distracted by their passengers. And almost half also said they drive more safely without their friends in the car.

The more, the scarier. Research shows that the risk of a fatal crash goes up in direct relation to the number of teenagers in the car.

Rule No. 6: Graduated Driver's License – Follow the State Law

Youths and Graduated Driver's Licenses. Chances are good that you live in one of the 46 states or the District of Columbia that has adopted a three-stage Graduated Driver's License law. Make sure you and your teenage driver know and understand the law, before they get behind the wheel.

Young, inexperienced drivers, particularly 16- to 17-year-olds, die too often in fatal crashes, in large part because of immaturity and inexperience. Three-stage GDL laws reduce these factors by reducing high-risk exposure for young drivers.

Analysis shows GDL laws have helped reduce crashes for this age group – anywhere between 20 and 40 percent. Keep your child alive by insisting they follow the GDL rules.

Rule No. 7: Set Your Own House Rules and Consequences

Youths and You. Never forget that more than 5,000 teens (15 – 20 years old) are killed in crashes on our roadways every year. Talk to your young drivers about their driving before and after they have their permit or license. Set the rules for driving and explain the consequences of breaking the rules. In fact, your house rules can be tougher than the GDL laws, based on your assessment of your teen.

Be accountable, make them accountable. Write up a contract if you want to spell it out. Sign it and have your teen driver sign. Remind them that driving is a privilege that can be easily revoked.

You can have a contract with your teen without writing it down. Keep an open dialog with your young driver and make your rules and consequences crystal clear. Talk often and stick to your own rules.

Adapted from information on NHTSA's multi-tiered strategy to prevent vehicle-related deaths and injuries among teen drivers. Info: http://www.nhtsa.gov

For free traffic safety items download from www.michigan.gov/ohsp (Traffic Safety Materials) or call 517-336-6130.