

## The Facts about Safe Driving

For most young drivers, learning to drive and getting a license is a life-changing experience. Suddenly, they do not have to find rides, take buses or ride their bike. But being able to drive also comes with a great deal of responsibility. All of this takes place at a time when young people are experiencing biological changes and greater time demands, leaving little time for proper sleep and other healthy habits. Before getting behind the wheel, there are several critical facts that young drivers should know.

**First, alcohol and driving do not mix.** Many teens are involved in crashes caused by alcohol even though it is illegal for people under the age of 21 to drink. Also, teens who have car crashes are often repeat offenders when it comes to obeying traffic laws. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

*28% of the teen drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking or had a prior moving violation such as speeding*

**Second, fatigue can be as deadly as alcohol.** Drowsiness impairs judgment, vision, hand-eye coordination, and reaction times just like alcohol and drugs. One study found that after 17 hours of being awake, a person has the same impairment on performance tests as someone with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05. Waking at 6:00 a.m. to catch a school bus creates the “17 hour danger” by 11:00 p.m. With accumulated sleep debt, similar fatigue can occur in less time.

*Combining sleepiness with driver inexperience can be dangerous - more than half of all fall-asleep crashes involve drivers aged 25 years or younger*

Biology, academic pressures, extracurricular activities and early school start times conspire to keep teens from their sleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation's 2006 *Sleep in America* poll, more than half of teens report feeling sleepy during the day.

**Third, distracted driving is unsafe at any speed.** Common factors that increase the risk of car crashes include:

- Distractions – eating, putting on make-up, talking on the phone or interacting with passengers can cause a crash
- Recklessness – teens who run stop signs and speed are more likely to crash
- Safety – not wearing a seatbelt increases the risk of dying in a car crash

**Fourth, drowsy driving among teens is common.** Teens are among the most sleep deprived Americans. According to NSF's 2006 poll:

*More than half of teens (51%) admit to having driven drowsy in the past year*

*Car crashes are the No. 1 killer of teens – 7,460 teen drivers were involved in fatal crashes in 2005*

The privilege of driving comes with certain responsibilities, and safety-conscious parents must do all they can to ensure their young drivers stay safe as they hit the road. That is why NSF created this safe driver agreement specifically for young drivers and their parents.

## The National Sleep Foundation Parent/Teen Safe Driving Agreement

Before getting behind the wheel, the National Sleep Foundation urges new drivers and their parents to promise themselves and each other the following:

### As a family, we agree that...

- Driving is not a right; it is a privilege that can be taken away
- Safe driving requires a person's complete attention and focus
- Driver performance is impaired by drugs, alcohol and sleepiness
- Proper sleep is important for health and safety and we will make it a priority in our lives
- Speeding and other forms of reckless driving are dangerous
- Seatbelts save lives

### As a new driver, I agree to...

- Wear a seatbelt and obey traffic laws at all times
- Not to use a phone while driving and to give driving my full attention
- Never to drive under the influence of drugs, alcohol or sleepiness
- Not to ride with someone under the influence of drugs, alcohol or sleepiness
- Learn about the signs of sleepiness
- Stop driving if I recognize the signs of sleepiness and find a safe place to nap, call home to be picked up or make arrangements for alternative transportation

### As parents, we agree to...

- Make sleep a household priority
- Be an example – we will not drive under the influence of sleepiness, drugs or alcohol or ride with others who do so
- Be supportive – we will pick up or help find alternative transportation for a driver impaired by drugs, alcohol or sleepiness
- Be a resource – we will review safe driving practices with our teen regularly

**This table outlines driving violations and their consequences for new drivers:**

Driving Violation	Consequence
Not wearing a seatbelt	Lose driving privileges for _____ days
Using a cell phone (texting or talking) while driving	Lose driving privileges for _____ days
Passenger restriction	Lose driving privileges for _____ days
Nighttime driving curfew	Lose driving privileges for _____ days
Driving under the influence of sleepiness	Lose driving privileges for _____ days
Speeding/reckless driving	Lose driving privileges for _____ days
Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs	Lose driving privileges for _____ days

### New Driver

I promise to abide by the rules outlined above. If I choose not to follow these rules, I understand that I will lose my driving privileges and will need to make other transportation arrangements.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents/Guardian**

I promise to set a good example and help my child to succeed in following these rules and to become a safe and responsible driver. I will make myself available to discuss these rules and driver safety when necessary.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_