

Driving

I can remember back in the good old days, before I had any children who wanted to drive, being in a seminar and the teacher saying they probably will not be able to drive when they're 16, but maybe later. I remember laughing when a friend of mine told me that her 18-year-old daughter had said, "I think I want to start driving mom." I remember the first time I let one of my children drive; when we returned home I got out of the car and pretended to kiss the ground. In a loud voice I was giving thanks for getting home in one piece. My wife was outside, so I ran up to her and kissed her and in a loud voice announced I was afraid I would never see her again.

Actually my daughter had done fairly well, that time. Later, however, I figured out why parents act crazy and joke when talking about their children driving. It is because they are nervous.

I remember thinking, "There is no way that child can drive. They are too flaky, too immature, and look at the rest of their life. Then they come and ask, "May I take drivers training?" So we set up guidelines.

First, they had to take an online computer-driving course and pass it. This helped prepare them to take a course through a driving school.

After passing the computer course, they had to go through a driving school that they paid for. (See note 1 at the end.) It was my responsibility to communicate with their driving instructor regularly.

We've made it very clear to our children that when they are driving, if we asked them to pull over, they had to do so immediately without asking why or arguing. We also made it clear that if they are having bad behaviors or attitudes in other parts of life we are not interested in them driving until that change is made. We didn't mean changing just at that moment. For them to just say I'm sorry and consider that a change is not enough. They have to prove it over a period of time. No set amount of time would work; they have to prove that they could control their emotions and/or their actions.

Before they get a license they have to have their own car. This means, they have to have enough money not only for the car, but also their insurance, gas, and maintenance. We looked into kids sharing a car. We said they would have to buy it together and insure it. The problem with this was insurance. If they were sharing a car and one of them had a wreck it would be held against both of their insurance in the future. Even though each kid was convinced that he/she would never have a wreck, they really thought that the other one might. Neither one was willing to take a chance. So, that didn't work.

If they can get their license, pay for a car and all the expenses that go with it, then they have shown some serious maturity and motivation. Then maybe they are ready

to drive .One of the things I am looking for is how they are doing in their executive functioning skills. (See teaching executive functioning skills at www.hayskids.com)

One thing I've had parents tell me is that they are afraid their child will kill someone while driving. That is a serious concern. In the long run it really is not going to be my decision if my child begins to drive. The state is the one who gives them a license not me. Once they are over 18, the only way I can stop them from getting a license is if the court has given me legal guardianship. In my mind, I also justify them driving by thinking about all the drunks on the road. With all this said, as a parent, I still have concerns for their lives and others. If I had serious reservations about a particular child being able to drive, I would do whatever I could to keep them from driving. I still feel a moral responsibility.

I have known several young adults who had a very hard time passing the test to get their license. I knew one person who had to take the written test 16 times in order to pass it. As one Fetal Alcohol teacher said, "They need to understand they may be able to get a license someday, but probably not when they're 16." I encourage both kids and their parents to be patient and not speed into this process.

My wife has made the statement a few times after driving with a kid, "How many times are we going to tempt God?"

We all have legitimate concerns about our children driving. We need to be very specific and concrete, with both our children and ourselves, the reasons for those concerns.

A FEW MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS, there are more:

- Slow processing-reaction time, not knowing what to do fast enough.
- Confusion.
- Not looking far enough down the road so that they can anticipate what may happen.
- Not thinking ahead so that they can anticipate what might happen.
- Losing concentration.
- Drifting into other lanes.
- Changing lanes without looking.
- Understanding proper speeds-in parking lots, when going around sharp turns, when coming up behind slower cars, and when it is raining or icy.
- When going around gentle turns in the road fading into the other lane.
- Not understanding when asked by the instructor to turn at the corner.
- Developmentally they are not ready to drive.

As parents, my wife and I have set down some guidelines. These have been added on to by other parents, professionals, and by the kids themselves:

Strategies:

- Talk to their driving instructor.
- Talk to other parents who have been or are in a similar situation.
- Don't allow caseworkers to badger you into letting your child get a license or use your car just because of the child's age. At the same time you may need to let them get a license and drive.
- Smaller vehicle are easier to drive and park.
- Practice on familiar roads. If they need to drive to work or school, practice driving the route they will take.
- Keep outside distractions to a minimum. These include music, food, and other kids. Talking on the phone and text messaging are forbidden.
- Be aware if one is having a bad day and help them choose not to drive.
- Don't drive tired.
- Must ask to pass another car, if an adult is in the car.
- After they have driven, sit down calmly and talk about how they did. First asked them what they think. Ask them about any problem areas. Ask them for strategies to solve problems. Give them your input.
- Be honest with them about their driving.
- As parents, we need to set a good example.
- They need to take responsibility for their mistakes while driving, not make excuses.
- They need to be mature in other parts of life. If they're throwing fits, constantly making excuses, having bad attitudes, being argumentative, etc. they need to understand this takes away your desire to let them drive because those same behaviors also affect their ability to drive responsibly.
- Drinking or drugs are totally unacceptable and that you will turn them in to the police.
- When driving, if we asked them to pull over, they have to do so immediately, without asking why or arguing.
- Remind them that if they get a ticket or have a wreck that their insurance will go up. They are also responsible for the financial cost of the ticket.

Tell them:

- I've talked to several parents whose children have wrecked their cars. In some of these cases, the child has blamed the parent. I've talked to parents whose children have taken their car without permission. You need to tell your child if you see your car missing you are going to call the police and report it as stolen, even if you think the child is the one who has it. You also need to tell them that if they take your car without permission and if you get a call from the police that there has been a wreck, you will tell the police that they did not have permission to use the car. The police should consider it stolen.
- If they are tired or just do not feel like driving they should tell you. You will respect them for it.

- At times when a child wants to drive I am emotionally spent or just do not feel like it. Take the time to explain that to them so that together you can decide on a better time.
- Alcohol or drug use will not be allowed and you will turn them in.

Note 1 - it is good if they can get a job outside of the home; but that is not always feasible. Instead of just giving them money give them jobs to do around the home. It is important while they do those jobs they do them as if they are working for someone else. It can be jobs such as doing dishes, cleaning the house, cooking, washing the car, yard work, or anything else. Once again, it is important while they are doing these jobs that they do them seriously; you are training them for future employment. Personally, I'm against giving allowances. I want them to learn to earn money and how to work. We do give gifts, sometimes money, but that is different. We take into account where a child is developmentally as to the level of work we expect. For additional information please refer to the lesson, Jobs at Home, www.hayskids