



youth service bureau

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## **Texting and Driving**

*Why Teens Do It, and How to Get Them to Stop*

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Research suggests that 34% of teens aged 16-17 say they have texted while driving, and 48% of all teens aged 12-17 say they have been in a car when the driver was texting. As parents, we know the extreme dangers of texting and driving. In 2012, 3,328 people were killed in car crashes involving a distracted driver. We tell our children to never text and drive, yet they still do it. Why do teens text and drive? What can we do about it?

### **Why Teens Text and Drive**

We know that teens are more likely than adults to take risks, even if that risk could have negative or dangerous consequences. They are also more likely to take risks when with friends.

It's also important to remember that teens' brains are still developing. Their brains aren't fully developed until age 25, and the part of the brain that controls decision-making, impulse control, self-regulation, and critical thinking is the last to develop.

What is especially interesting about the brain is that it rewards us anytime we engage with our devices. We get a shot of dopamine (the "happy" neurotransmitter) anytime we receive, send, and even anticipate receiving a text message. This, combined with the fact that teens have a hard time regulating their behavior and saying "no," means that it's especially hard for teens to ignore their devices when they get a text message, even when driving.

Teens may understand the very real dangers of texting and driving, but when in the moment (or when in the car with friends), their reasoning gets overridden by the urgency and desire to check messages and respond.

### **How to Get Teens to Stop Texting and Driving**

#### **1) Model what you want to see**

Kids learn through observation, and we know that actions can speak louder than words. Simply telling your teen to not text and drive is not enough. We need to show them what this looks like.

15% of teens report seeing their parents text while driving. This sends the message that if parents/adults do it, then it's okay for me to do it too. Teens may also see parents accessing the Internet (to look up directions, for example) when driving or at a stoplight. All of these actions send a message to teens that it is okay to text (use a device) and drive.

## **2) Educate them about the laws**

According to Minnesota law, it is illegal for drivers under age 18 to use a cell phone, whether hand-held or hands-free, except to call 911 in an emergency. It is illegal for drivers of ALL ages to compose, read, or send text messages or access the Internet while the vehicle is in motion or a part of traffic.

## **3) Work together to develop rules for driving that ALL family members must follow**

## **4) Write a teen driving contract that contains rules about texting and driving**

## **5) Explore W82txt and other programs that help prevent texting and driving**

## **6) Discuss ways resist peer pressure, and what to say to a friend who is texting and driving**

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## **Resources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Distracted Driving"

[http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted\\_driving/](http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted_driving/)

CNN, "Brutally Honest: How to keep your teens from texting and driving"

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/17/living/feat-brutally-honest-teens-texting-driving/>

Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety, "Teen Driver Laws"

<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ots/laws/Pages/teen-drivers.aspx>

Pew Research Center, "Teens and Distracted Driving"

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/11/16/teens-and-distracted-driving/>