

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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Right-of-way



This may be a hard concept to accept for many but, as a parent teaching your child to drive, it's an important concept to remember and pass on. The concept?... No one has the right-of-way!

Now people are going to start arguing that the law is clear on who has the right-of-way and we've all been taught about which drivers have the right-of-way. Is that really true? No, it's not! There's no law in any state that says who has the right-of-way. The law only says who must give up the right-of-way. If you look at your state driving manual, you'll see that it clearly says who must give up the right of way. For example:

- A vehicle entering a major road from a side street or driveway must give the right-of-way to vehicles already on the road.
- A vehicle entering a freeway from an on-ramp must yield the right-of-way to vehicles already on the freeway.
- Vehicles at railroad crossings must yield the right-of-way to trains.
- Drivers must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians in the crosswalk.
- Drivers making a left turn at an intersection must yield to vehicles in the oncoming lane.

All the time, drivers involved in a crash argue that they shouldn't be held responsible for a crash because they had the right-of-way. However, the investigating officer will only try to determine who should have given up the right-of-way and who was guilty of failure to yield. Any time another driver has to swerve or step on the brakes to avoid crashing into you, you're guilty of failure to yield the right-of-way.

Every driver has a duty to avoid a crash at all costs and, sometimes, that means giving the right-of-way to another driver, even when you feel the right-of-way should have been given to you.

Remember that you can't take the right-of-way, you can only give it up to another driver, and often, the prudent thing to do to avoid a crash is to give up the right-of-way to an inconsiderate road hog who should have yielded to you.

So, before arguing that you had the right-of-way, remember that it wasn't yours to begin with. The right-of-way is only yours if another considerate, law-abiding driver yields it to you.

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The Myth of Motor Vehicle Accidents

While we're talking to our young drivers about hard to believe concepts, here's another one.

There's no such thing as a motor vehicle accident!



In order to grasp this one, we have to understand the meaning of the word “accident.” An accident is something over which we have no control! Being struck by lightning, a tree limb falling on your head, are accidents. A motor vehicle crash, on the other hand, is caused; it's caused by one or more drivers who make a poor choice that set in motion a chain of events that leads to a crash. It may have been unintentional but it was no accident.

When someone tries to beat a red light and winds up crashing into another vehicle, it was a choice. When you drive at a speed that keeps you from stopping in time to avoid a crash, that's a choice. When you drive too fast to hold your car on the road in a curve and go flying off into the trees, that's a choice. Even something as simple as taking your eyes off the road for a few moments and failing to notice the vehicles stopped ahead is a choice and it's those kinds of poor choices that lead to car crashes.

When you hear someone say about a motor vehicle crash, “It was an accident, nothing could have prevented it”, don't believe them. Any number of things could have been done to prevent it if the right choices had been made.

Teen Driving Resources

Parents are normally the primary source for teaching their teens how to drive but those parents are usually woefully ill-prepared for the role of driving instructor. Thankfully, there are some resources available to help.

The first thing for parents to plan for is the age at which their child starts learning to drive. Most parents associate the teen years with the age at which a child starts learning to drive but it begins much earlier than that. Your child started learning to drive as a small child sitting in their car seat. That's when they began to notice and copy your driving behaviors. That's also the age at which they began to pick up any bad driving habits you may have. To be an effective driving instructor, you have to start exhibiting proper driving behaviors and a respect for driving laws.



The one thing to remember is that it's never too late to start. Even if you exhibited bad driving behaviors in the past, you can change those behaviors but you have to let your child know why you are changing those behaviors. Teens pick up on hypocrisy very quickly and saying "Do as I say, not as I do" won't work with them.

It never hurts to refresh yourself on your state's driving manual. It's amazing how much we forget once we've passed our own driving exam. You want to be able to give a correct answer if your teen asks about a sign or driving law.

There are other excellent resources available to help you and your teen through the driver education process.

1. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Research Institute. – This site provides a wealth of articles and guides based on scientific research to help parents. You can visit their website at: <https://www.teendriversource.org/>
2. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) – You may know this organization better as the folks who send crash dummies crashing into walls. The IIHS website also has articles based on research along with advice on how to choose the best car for your teen. You can visit the IIHS website at: <https://www.iihs.org/topics/teenagers>

