

*Teenage Driving Contract by Dale Wisely, Ph.D.
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PARENTING THE TEENAGE DRIVER: A CONTRACT

Why do a driving contract?

- Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in young people
- Teenagers, as a group, are less experienced, more impulsive, less developed judges of situations.
- Your teenage driver is in danger of killing or maiming himself or herself or other innocent people.
- If you don't do a contract, you will likely be vague in your rules and directions about driving.
- The contract signals the teenager that driving is a serious and potentially deadly activity.

The first step in this process is important and often the most difficult. It is that you reflect carefully on the problem and firmly resolve to do all you can reasonably do to prevent driving-related disasters from happening.

Establish with the teenager, in advance, your firm determination to reach an agreement prior to their driving. You must be willing to state (and mean) that **you will not allow the teen to drive until an agreement is reached and signed**. State this...and then be willing to ride out the storm of teenage protest.

If possible, if two parents are involved, parents should reach an agreement about the contract before it discussed with the teenager.

DO NOT ALLOW A TEENAGER TO DRIVE INDEPENDENTLY UNTIL THE AGREEMENT IS NEGOTIATED, WRITTEN, REVISED, AND SIGNED! DON'T LET YOUR TEEN DRIVE WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT.

Sign it and provide a copy to the teenager. Set a date to revise it after a period of time during which the teen drives. Schedule the review date and put it on the calendar. On this review date, go through it and change the agreement a little (or a lot) based on experience. Make it stricter if the teen's behavior with the car warrants that. Make it a bit more lenient, perhaps, if the teen is doing well. **START WITH A FAIRLY STRICT CONTRACT.** The Model Contract begins below:

Driving Agreement

General Principles

The new driver must initial each point to show it is read and understood it:

____ I recognize that driving is a privilege, **not** a right. The State's role is to determine that I meet the *basic* legal requirements for a license. Permission to drive is **not** a legal right: It is granted to me by my parents, who are under no obligation to do so, and who may withdraw the privilege at any time. I understand that I will only be allowed to drive when I am willing to abide by the rules and regulations established by my parents.

I recognize that driving a car is a very serious matter. I recognize that...

____ Automobile accidents are the **leading cause of death** of people 16-20 years old.

____ I am **more likely to die** in an auto accident than from any other cause.

____ Recklessness or errors that I make while driving **could kill or hurt me**, kill or hurt passengers in my car, and/or kill or hurt people in other cars and pedestrians. Among those that could be victims of my driving mistakes are: Infants, children, my friends, my family members, parents of children, and many others.

____ I will abide by laws regulating driving. I will observe and abide by posted speed limits. I will abide by rules established by my parents. I recognize these are for my protection and the protection of others.

____ I understand that the car I drive is **property of my parents**. I drive the car **only with permission**.

____ I understand that my parents and I must be able to reach a written agreement in order for me to be permitted to drive. I understand that the terms of this agreement may be changed based on how I handle the freedom and responsibility of driving. The rules will get stricter if my parents judge that I am not doing well. It will get somewhat less strict if my parents judge that I am doing well.

RULES-Category A

These rules, if violated, will lead to indefinite suspension of driving privileges. This is the most serious set of rules. I understand that I may lose my driving privileges indefinitely if any one of these is violated even once.

1. **No alcohol use/abuse.** As a minor, it is illegal for me to drink alcohol. I will not drive for 24 hours after my last use of alcohol in ANY amount. **No drug use/abuse.** I will not drive for 72 hours after my last use of any "substance." In this agreement, "substance" means any drug or chemical (including but not limited to marijuana, pills, inhalants, and other drugs) which would be expected *by my parents* to alter my ability to drive. There is no acceptable amount of any substance of this kind. If I use any drugs, I will not drive for 72 hours. This rule may include medications prescribed to me or over-the-counter medications. In the cases of legal medications, I will inform my parents of any such medications I have taken so that they can judge whether taking these medications will interfere with my driving ability.
 - a. **No riding with others who have used alcohol or drugs.** I will not ride as a passenger with any driver who has used alcohol or any substance as defined

above. I will not ride with any one who it would be reasonable to think may have used alcohol or drugs, when I am unsure if they have.

- b. **Alternatives to riding with others** who have used alcohol or drugs. If I find myself in a situation as described in 1,2,or 3 above, I will contact my parents or another designated adult to arrange for transportation. I understand that my parents will appreciate that behavior and will make every effort to avoid asking me a lot of questions about it.
 - c. No **alcohol or drugs in car**. I will not allow alcohol or illegal drugs in the car.
2. **No thrill-seeking/stunts**. I will not engage in any thrill-seeking behavior while driving. I will not drive for recreation. Driving too fast, racing of all kinds, and any kind of "stunt" involving a car is NOT ALLOWED. Driving is for transportation ONLY.
 3. **Informing parents about accidents & police encounters**. I will inform my parents about any and all tickets, accidents, and encounters with police.
 4. **No firearms** or other weapons. I will not drive with any guns or other deadly weapons in the vehicle.

RULES-Category B

Violations will lead to suspension of driving privileges for up to three months.

1. **Permission to Drive**. I must ask permission to drive each time I drive. Exceptions to this rule will be given for regularly scheduled transportation to school, work, regular meetings, etc. I will ask permission to drive to specific locations and will discuss the route planned. I will be certain that my parents know where I am. I will not make unscheduled stops or side trips.
2. **Off-Limit Areas**. I will not drive on streets, highways, or in areas that are designated as off-limits. I understand that greater flexibility in these matters will come as I gain experience and show that I am honoring the agreement. For the time being, the following roads and areas are to be avoided:
 3. **No one else drives vehicle**. I will not permit any other person to drive the car without my parents' specific permission for each specific case.
 4. **Limit on passengers**. I will limit the number of passengers (not counting parents) to _____ (recommended: 1 or 2 for new drivers).

RULES-CATEGORY C

Violations may lead to suspension of driving privileges for up to six weeks.

1. **Weather/road conditions**. I will respect weather and road conditions, slowing down as needed for safety. I will contact my parents to discuss weather or poor road conditions when I am out driving.

2. **Emotional upset.** Knowing that judgment and driving skills are altered by emotions, I will not drive when I am upset or angry. Under these conditions, I will contact my parents for transportation and I reserve the right to maintain my privacy regarding personal matters.
3. **Taking care of vehicle.** It is my responsibility to protect the car I drive. I will keep it reasonably clean and maintained. I have some specific responsibilities regarding the maintenance of the car as noted below:
4. **Passenger behavior.** I will not allow my passengers to behave in such a way as to damage the car or distract me while driving.
5. **Seatbelts.** will wear my seatbelt and shoulder harness at all times and require all passengers to wear them.
6. **Friends ride only with their parents permission.** When transporting my friends, I will be reasonably sure that they have their parents' permission to ride with me.
7. **No Smoking.** I will not allow smoking in the car. I will not smoke in the car.
8. **No eating & driving.** I will not eat while driving.
9. **Car audio system.** For the first two months I drive, I will not have the car stereo on. After the first two months, after clearing this with my parents, I will be allowed to have the stereo on but will make no adjustments to it other than changing the volume while driving. Under no circumstances will I change a CD or cassette while driving. I will change these only when stopped or pulled over.
10. **Other electronics.** I will not use beepers, cell phones, or operate car stereos while driving. I will pull over for other operations of beepers, cell phones, and electronic equipment.
11. **No rushing.** Accidents are more likely to happen when I rush. I am more likely to rush when I leave late. Therefore, my parents reserve the right to not allow me to drive unless I leave by a time they specify. For example, if my parents tell me that I must allow 20 minutes to get to something that starts at 7:00 , ***I may not leave later than that.*** In such cases, my parents will attempt to provide alternative transportation, to whatever extent possible.

SPECIAL ITEMS:

1. **Tickets and moving violations** will result in suspension of my driving privileges for a period to be determined by my parents. My parents have no obligation to pay my fines for driving-related tickets.
2. **Financial.** I will make certain financial contributions to the purchase of the car, maintenance of the car, and/or insurance. My contributions are currently as follows:

3. **Family obligations.** I agree to provide transportation to family members at the directive of my parents. Fulfilling these obligations is a condition of my use of a car. Sometimes these responsibilities will override my own desires and interests in using the car.

5. **General life responsibilities.** I agree that I must be responsible to drive safely and that my parents must believe I am relatively responsible in order to allow me to drive. They may, therefore, take into account how I handle my general responsibilities, including schoolwork, employment, household duties. I will also maintain a respectful attitude. I will not ask my parents to allow me to drive when I am rude and disrespectful to them or to others.

6. **Right to clear expectations.** My parents have a right to expect me to be responsible. I have a right to be told what this means. For this reason, I may ask my parents for clarification of their requirement that I "be responsible."

7. **Changes in this agreement.** I understand that this contract will be made more strict at any time my parents believe that is the best thing to do. I understand that if I consistently abide by these rules that my parents will work with me to make the contract less strict as I gain experience. However, I understand that--bottom line--it is my parents' choice and responsibility to change or not change the contract. **We will review this agreement and perhaps make changes to it on _____(date) or earlier if my parents or I wish to do so.**

Summary: I agree to abide by the rules in this contract and I accept the consequences and penalties if I do not. I recognize my parents' authority in deciding if I may drive. That authority is final until I am an adult living independent of my parents.

Signatures

DRIVER _____ (date)

PARENT(s)/Guardian(s) _____ (date)

PARENT(s)/Guardian(s) _____ (date)