

# Teen Safe-Driving Expert Pinpoints Seven Steps Parents Can Take in 2024 That Might Save Their Child's Life

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*Car crashes are the top cause of death for teens. Doug Herbert urges parents to focus their 2024 resolution on keeping their new driver safe—and alive.*

CONCORD, NC, USA, December 29, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When most people make New Year's resolutions, they're usually thinking of how they can improve themselves and their own life. Yet if they're parents, nothing is more important than the wellbeing of their child. That's why Doug Herbert suggests parents make 2024 the year they take action to keep their teen driver safe, smart, healthy...and alive.

"Driving is one of the most dangerous things we do each day regardless of our age," says Herbert, founder of B.R.A.K.E.S., a national free teen hands-on defensive driving program. "Yet we expect teens with little experience to navigate the road with the skill of a seasoned driver. They spend far more time training for sports than training to operate a vehicle.

"To keep them and other travelers safe, teens need more hands-on experience than they receive in drivers ed," he adds. "Parents can, and should, play a big role in giving them that extra practice. And yet we rarely think about this serious responsibility—until it's too late."

If it sounds like this mission is personal for Herbert, that's because it is. The former drag racer founded B.R.A.K.E.S.—which stands for Be Responsible And Keep Everyone Safe—after his two sons Jon and James died in a car crash in 2008. Determined to spare other parents the heartbreak he experienced, he dedicated his life to helping teens become safer drivers. To learn more about his story and his organization, visit [www.putonthebrakes.org](http://www.putonthebrakes.org).

Here are some things parents can do in 2024 to help your child become a better driver.

Learn the (scary) statistics. Parents have good reason to worry when their teenage child gets behind the wheel. The statistics about teen deaths from car crashes couldn't be scarier:

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens (15 to 18 years old) in the United States. (NHTSA-DOT) If 2,723 people died in a plane crash every year we would stop and do something about it, says Herbert, who is also a pilot.
- Almost half of teen drivers and passengers who died in car crashes in 2019 were not

wearing their seatbelt. (National Safety Council)

- In 2020 there were 2,738 young drivers who died in traffic crashes, a 14 percent increase from 2019. (National Safety Council)
- Incidents of dropping wheels off the road are the number one cause of all fatal crashes. (NHTSA-DOT)
- Six out of ten teen crashes involve driver distraction. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)

“Once you realize how at risk your beloved child actually is, and you really let the numbers sink in, you’ll realize you have to take action,” says Herbert.

Commit to regular practice ride-alongs. Herbert urges parents to make time to practice driving with their teen. Considering how little training they get behind the wheel, he says teens need this one-on-one time to gain skills and confidence.

“Your job is to provide the education and the practice they need, so put practice times on your calendar and stick to them,” says Herbert. “If you write the commitment down, you’re much more likely to follow through. Even though it’s much easier to just drive places yourself and let them ride along, you’ll never regret the time and energy you spend helping them be the best driver possible. Make this your top priority.”

Don’t make driving time something they dread. Teens learn better in a calm, positive, encouraging environment. Yelling, lecturing or berating them when they make a driving mistake or for any reason is counterproductive. It’s best for parents to explain what they should do next time and let them know they will help them practice until they master the skill or maneuver. Keeping an upbeat attitude makes the process easier for everyone.

Insist on a hard and fast “No phones while driving” rule. Distracted drivers put themselves and others at risk, says Herbert. One in three teens who text say they have done so while driving. And research has found that dialing a phone number while driving increases the risk of crashing by six times, and texting while driving increases the risk by 23 times. (NHTSA-DOT) Teach kids to never use their phones for talking or texting while the car is in motion. And parents need to follow their own rules; don’t call or text kids when they are driving and expect them to answer or respond.

Set the right example. Sometimes parents do the very things they constantly warn their children not to do. They might think that because they are more experienced they can bend the rules without compromising safety. This is not true. Distracted driving is something children learn from their parents. Herbert urges parents to look at their own driving habits and to refrain from touching the phone or the radio, or fiddling with Bluetooth while driving. Keep both hands on the wheel. Always look ahead and avoid distracting conversations.

Teach teens codes and “tricks” to get out of dangerous passenger situations. Teens may find themselves in a situation where they feel unsafe riding as a passenger. To prepare them for this

potential scenario, come up with a plan to get them to safety, says Herbert. Parents might choose a secret code teens text them if they feel they are in danger. When they see that code, they call their child, and tell them they are needed at home immediately, and that they will come to pick them up. Then the teen can ask the driver to let them out where they are. Another quick and effective method is to instruct teens to say, "I think I'm going to throw up. Stop the car."

Give them ONE "free pass." Realistically, kids sometimes make mistakes. If they drink at a party, for example, the most important thing is making sure they get home safe. It's a good idea to let kids know that they get one free pass where the parent will come to pick them up and drive them home without negative consequences. If the child uses their "free pass," the parent can wait until the next day to discuss their bad decisions, and make sure they understand not to make them again.

"No one wants to think about worst-case scenarios, but it's important to understand the risks when your child gets behind the wheel and to do all you can to set them up for success," concludes Herbert. "Peace of mind comes from knowing they are trained and ready to respond in emergency situations. People always ask me, 'What is the safest car to drive?' The answer is one with a well-trained driver...I can't think of a better gift to give your kids—and yourself—in 2024."

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1. NHTSA-DOT
2. National Safety Council
3. National Safety Council
4. NHTSA-DOT
5. AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety
6. NHTSA-DOT

About B.R.A.K.E.S:

B.R.A.K.E.S. (Be Responsible And Keep Everyone Safe) is a non-profit 501(c)3 founded in 2008 by NHRA Top Fuel drag racer Doug Herbert in memory of his sons, John and James, who were tragically killed in a car crash on January 26, 2008. His grief led to his resolve to create a driving program which would help to prevent other families from experiencing similar heartbreak by teaching young drivers more conscientious and confident skills behind the wheel.

B.R.A.K.E.S. is a free hands-on defensive driving program. The curriculum includes an array of defensive driving techniques, including crash avoidance, distracted driving, drop wheel/off road recovery, and panic stops, as well as car control and recovery. By training and educating teenage drivers and their parents, the program aims to promote safe driving, to prevent injuries, and to

save lives. B.R.A.K.E.S. hosts dozens of schools at locations across the U.S. every year.

Each three-hour session includes 30 minutes of classroom instruction followed by five hands-on driving exercises: Crash Avoidance/Slalom, Drop Wheel/Off Road Recovery, Distracted Driving Awareness, Panic Braking/ABS Stop, and Car Control/Skid Recovery. Our schools are open to teens aged 15 to 19 with a valid driver's license or learner's permit and at least 30 hours' experience behind the wheel. (Teens in North Carolina must be 16 to take the program.) Parents or legal guardians are required to attend B.R.A.K.E.S. with their teen. B.R.A.K.E.S. training is free, but requires a \$99 refundable deposit, which minimizes no-shows and missed training opportunities.

To learn more, please visit [www.putonthebrakes.org](http://www.putonthebrakes.org).

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