
How to Teach My Teen to Drive

Mental Preparation

If you finally decide that your teen is ready to start driving you may be left wondering ‘what next?’. Before you have your child get behind the wheel of a car, you should teach them several important lessons that may not be as obvious to them as other teen drivers. First, make sure your teen understands that driving is full of the unexpected. They may do very well with following road rules and regulations; however, this doesn't mean that other drivers on the road pay the same attention to these details. You should also explain to them what ‘road rage’ is and how they can avoid triggering another driver. Finally, teach them about distractions such as playing music and trying to make calls. Depending on your teen, you may want them to avoid doing these tasks entirely while driving.

Assessment and Training

If you want to further prepare your teen before beginning to drive, several programs can help with the physical skills. The University of Utah has a computer-based driving simulator that can help assess and train people on pre-driving-related activities. These simulations focus on skills such as reaction time, steering, pedal operation, hazard avoidance driving, etc, to help evaluate and train new drivers with physical, social, and cognitive challenges. There are other similar programs available that may be more accessible if you're not located in Utah or the Salt Lake City area, including virtual reality applications such as Drive VR or It Can't Wait Driving Simulation.





Preparation for Practice

Before your teen begins learning to drive, make sure you look into the legal requirements and regulations. In the state of Utah, you have to be at least 15 years old before you can obtain a learner's permit. After your teen obtains their permit, they can then legally drive a car with an approved driving instructor, parent, or legal guardian who is licensed. Each state will have different requirements so make sure you look into your state's policies if you are located outside of Utah.

Physical Practice

Once you feel your teen fully understands and can execute the mental and physical requirements of driving, it's time to get on the road with yourself or a professional. The way you teach will look pretty similar to the way you teach a teenager without ASD. To start, it's helpful to drive in parking lots or take familiar routes so your teen can get comfortable behind the wheel. You can also enroll your teen into classes for additional practice guided by a professional. If your ASD child is struggling or getting overwhelmed, it's ok to delay any further practice, take frequent breaks, and/or avoid unfamiliar routes until they feel comfortable enough to continue learning new driving skills. Teaching your teen with ASD how to drive may take a little bit longer, but it's something that can be achieved by many teens if given sufficient support.

References

- University of Utah
<https://healthcare.utah.edu/locations/sugar-house/rehab-therapy/drive-rehab-program.php>
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