

# Choose a safe car for your teen



## It's a frightening fact for any parent:

Teens have the highest death rate from auto crashes of any age group owing to their inexperience and, too often, their immature behavior behind the wheel.

If your teen does have a wreck, what he or she drives can make the difference between a sobering lesson and a serious injury (or worse). In fact, choosing the right car may be the single most important thing you can do to protect your teen. It's with him or her all the time – even when your good advice is temporarily forgotten.

While your son or daughter may be thinking “sporty and cool,” the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the Insurance Information Institute stress size, safety features, and reliability when choosing that first car.

**Size.** Look for a mid- to full-sized car for your teen. Small cars offer much less protection in crashes than larger ones.

**Safety features.** Air bags, head restraints, anti-lock brakes, traction control, electronic stability control, and daytime running lights are all safety features that can put the odds on your teen's side. Because many of those features have become available only in the past five to 10 years, you'll want to choose a late-model car for your teen. For example, a newer mid-sized car with side air bags would be a better choice than an older, larger car without them.

**Stability.** Sport utility vehicles (SUVs), especially the smaller ones, are prone to rollovers owing to their high centers of gravity. Quick steering maneuvers – the kind that can result from over-correcting a driving error – could cause an SUV to roll over while a car might simply skid.

**Image.** What your teen drives has a surprising influence on how he or she drives. Avoid cars with reputations for high performance or features (like turbocharging) that beg your young driver to speed.

**Crash-test ratings.** Get objective information on how cars perform in crashes from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, and Insurance Information Institute. All have Web sites or you can check your local library for publications.

**Professional vehicle inspections.** If you're planning to buy a used car for your teen, take it to a reliable mechanic – even if you have the car's maintenance record – and ask him or her to give it the once-over. A breakdown can be a frightening and dangerous experience for your teen.

You can check some things, too, during the test drive. For example, does the car have a spare tire and jack? Do the windshield wipers and all the electronic equipment work? Do the headlights provide adequate visibility?

Choosing a car for your teen is no decision to take lightly, but it can be a learning experience for both of you – and one of those “growing up” memories you'll both come to treasure.

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