



## *Auto*

### TOP 10 MISTAKES NEW DRIVERS MAKE

Why do 16-year-olds top the list of accident-prone drivers?

“Inexperience” seems the obvious answer. But the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says maturity (that is, a lack of it) factors in, too, since the crash rate among older first-time drivers is somewhat lower. The youngest drivers on the road, it seems, simply don’t pay enough attention behind the wheel.

[Cars.com](#) enlisted the help of DriversEd.com founder Gary Tsifrin to dig deeper into the specific kinds of mistakes young drivers make. Here are some of his top 10, plus a few of our own:

- 1) **Distractions.** No matter how catlike their reflexes, young drivers can’t compensate for the distractions that their ultra-connected world brings. A yearlong Virginia Tech observational study concluded that distraction contributes to 80% of collisions.
- 2) **Risky behavior.** Teenagers may be wired to take more risks (like ignoring traffic signals) than their brothers and sisters who are in their early 20s. Studies show that in teens, the area of the brain associated with impulsiveness is twice as active as it is in young adults.
- 3) **A need for speed.** Teens drive an average of 1.3 miles per hour faster than other drivers. That doesn’t sound like much, but for a driver who has little experience reacting to and anticipating highway emergencies, speed obliterates precious time needed to avoid a crash.

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- 4) **Too many passengers.** Teen drivers with a carload of buddies are more likely to speed and follow other vehicles too closely, particularly if there's a male passenger in the front seat, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Interestingly, a female passenger in the front seat with a male driver has the opposite effect. Washington and Oregon's graduated licensing laws limit the number of passengers teens can carry.
- 5) **Driving drunk or high.** Youth, inexperience, and intoxication are an especially lethal combination.
- 6) **Following too closely.** Compared with older drivers, teens left nearly two-tenths of a second less following distance behind the car in front of them, according to an NIH study. At 40 miles per hour, that translates to 10 fewer feet of stopping distance.
- 7) **Driving beltless.** Although less of a problem in Washington than in other parts of the country, seat-belt use among teens tends to be lower than that for other age groups.
- 8) **Getting bullied by other drivers.** "Honk, honk, honk!" Novice drivers, who are still unsure of their driving judgment, can easily get rattled by impatient honks or gestures from other drivers (or even a line of cars behind them at an intersection), prompting them to panic and pull into traffic when they can't see if it's really clear. Passengers can have the same effect with comments like, "C'mon, go!"
- 9) **Drowsy driving.** Practice-weary athletes, students with after-school jobs, and straight-A overachievers are among those most likely to drive drowsy. Check out our customer newsletter, [\*Perspective\*](#), for an eye-opening article on drowsy driving.
- 10) **Poor car choice.** Cool and cheap often trump sturdy and safe when it comes to a teen's choice of wheels. Link to our customer newsletter, [\*Perspective\*](#), for a helpful article on choosing safe cars for teens.

To learn more about helping the young drivers in your life make safer choices, visit our [teen drivers site](#).