

Helping a Teen Drive Responsibly

One of the joys—and terrors—of parenthood is having children “come of age” and begin driving. It is a joy for me because I have avoided a lot of running around since I’ve had a teen driver to call on for the errands—and these young drivers don’t seem to mind the running around. It is a terror, of course, because of the danger that driving entails and the difficulty of letting go and allowing my child to face those dangers without me.

Just this minute, after writing the last sentence, my son Drew called me from town to say he was heading home and did we need anything. Pam, my wife, looked around and thought of a couple of food items. So my 16-year-old will bring them home and I won’t have to run to the store later. Nice for me (and I do have to get this issue out before too many more months pass!).

But I have also uttered a few extra prayers this afternoon: as Drew left the house, as I occasionally thought of him while I was working here at the computer. One thing I’ll say about teen drivers: they are a boon to your prayer life!

Drew has an older sister, Sarah, who is almost 18. But she does not have her license yet. She got her training permit about a year ago, and renewed it after six months; but she hasn’t shown much interest in driving. It appears that after the initial thrill of the experience wore off, Sarah has concluded that driving is not such a vital necessity after all. Come to think of it, I guess her second permit has expired (I wonder if she even knows that). [Note: Sarah did get her license a few months after turning 18.]

Now Drew, on the other hand, has actively sought every conceivable (and inconceivable) opportunity to drive, and he was ready to take his driving test at 12:01 on his sixteenth birthday last November. And I was happy to have him get his license because I knew it would be a blessing to have the additional driver.

But I faced the questions: How shall I turn over this huge responsibility to him? How can I assure that he operates the vehicle safely at all times? How can I entrust the lives of my other children and others to him? Is there any way I can have a measure of control even though I will not be with him? Does he have the internal controls to take on this responsibility?

The vehicle I decided to use to give me the assurances I needed is the “Driving Agreement” **[Please note: that driving agreement is longer available online, sorry. Please refer to the suggested agreements at the end of this document].** This agreement binds both my son and myself to certain commitments. We discussed these and both signed the covenant. I’ll just make a few comments about the content. The numbers in my comments correspond to those in the original Driving Agreement.

Drew needs to become independent. That's part of becoming a man. But I want that independence to be of the godly variety ... one that keeps his heart bound to mine and his conscience sensitive to the Lord. I decided that having a son or daughter start driving didn't need to be sheer terror. It can instead be a delight and an opportunity for them to grow in grace and for father and child to draw closer together. But I still pray a lot more.

My Son's Agreement

- (1) I wanted Drew's promise to keep the rules and drive safely. This is primarily for the welfare of the people in the vehicles, but the fact is we only have liability insurance and so the vehicles would not be covered in an accident we caused.
- (2) It is important for him to be directed by his own conscience, since I won't be there to monitor him.
- (3) This is to obviate any temptation for Drew to think that driving removes him from my authority or that he is now free to establish his own independent lifestyle.
- (4) If he does not keep first things first, he doesn't need the privilege of driving.
- (5) This, too, is a recognition of my authority. It is important for him to know that there are real sanctions.

My Agreement

- (1) If this Agreement is for real, I have to take it seriously and keep it in mind, just like my son.
- (2) Driving tempts young people to independence. I wanted it to have the opposite effect of giving me a way to draw even closer to Drew.
- (3) This one hurt. I need the integrity to stick to the rules of the road even when alone. If I don't, how can I expect my son to do what I won't. My rebellious spirit could infect him. Ouch!
- (4) He can help when he has enough income, but I am glad to provide the insurance for now. I don't want his need for insurance money to make him think he needs to become a drudge at McDonalds or something (as if I would allow that).

Some Suggested Sample Driving Agreements:

Teen Driving Agreement

Parent-Teen Driving Contract
