

## **A Road Map for Parents and their New Teen Drivers**

It takes a tough parent not to panic the first time you sit in the passenger side of your car with your child in the driver's seat. Your yearning to be emancipated from car-pooling quickly evaporates as you contemplate this new reality. Rest assured that planning and practice will help make your child a smart, safe driver.

Teens can apply for their Learner's Permit on their sixteenth birthday. If your child is not interested in rushing to the DMV to get their permit, pat yourself on the back for having been granted a reprieve. However, if your child wants to drive at the first legal opportunity, head straight to the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles website ([www.dmv.ny.gov](http://www.dmv.ny.gov)). It is an excellent resource for learning the mechanics of getting a license and also has multitudes of useful information for younger drivers and their parents.

The website will tell you all you need to know about getting a Learner's Permit. Be warned that the White Plains office is not an option for getting a permit. You will need to go to Yonkers (where you can make an appointment online) or Peekskill (which is known for its quiet atmosphere) for the written test. Remind your child to bring the required paperwork, to study the driver's manual and to take a couple of practice tests online so that they pass the written test with flying colors.

Learner's permit in hand; consider that your son's or daughter's first time behind the wheel will go more smoothly if they are in a wide-open space without much traffic. This can be tough to find in Scarsdale, but a short drive to places like SUNY Purchase or WCC during "off hours" can work.

Teaching someone to drive is not as easy as it might seem. For instance, do you remember how to break down the steps of a turn, or has it just become automatic over the years? Even the most even-tempered parent can quickly resort to screaming or slamming a foot on an imaginary brake from the passenger's side of the car. By the end of your first session, you may be wondering how you will provide your teen with the required 50 hours of practice driving needed for the road test (including 15 hours at night). Fortunately, there are many options for a driving instructor to take some of the burden off of you!

Driver's Education courses are operated through many neighboring schools in the spring, summer and fall. These courses are a large time commitment, so planning is required to make sure your son's or daughter's schedule does not get overloaded. The classes follow a 48 hour structured curriculum set by the state. Half the student's time is spent in the classroom and the rest is on the road. There is no skimping—if your student does not complete each class, or a make up class, they will not get their certificate. Eastchester, Maria Regina and Mercy College are among some local schools that offer these driver's education courses, which are mostly administered through PAS Driving School.

The advantages of these programs is that they teach students defensive driving skills, provide eligibility for an insurance discount and allow students to obtain their senior license a year earlier, at age 17. Drawbacks are that these programs

are expensive, often in the \$500 range, so consider this when calculating any insurance savings. Students often complain the classroom material is boring. Also, road time is often divided between three other drivers, so their actual driving time is limited by the fact they might only be driving 25% of the time they are supposedly getting “hands on” driving experience. Students will probably not get any highway driving experience, as these programs tend to stick to local roads.

SHS offered driver’s education courses in years past, but the program was discontinued due to the excessive administrative time required by the school, and by parent complaints about the quality of the teaching. The SHS PTA Safety Committee looked into bringing these courses back to SHS a few years ago and after substantial study, decided not to push for Driver’s Education in Scarsdale. Instead, the committee co-sponsors a driver safety assembly for young drivers and their parents with the High School and Scarsdale Family Counseling Service.

There are also a plethora of private driving schools in our area, offering a range of services including private driving instruction, scheduling and taking teens to the road test and the 5 hour required pre licensing course. Angie’s List and Yelp provide little assistance in choosing the best local driving school. Fresh Green Light seems to be popular in Scarsdale, but asking others about their experience with local driving schools is probably the best method of picking a school.

One unique program focusing on crash prevention is In Control ([www.drivingincontrol.org](http://www.drivingincontrol.org)). The program offers certified, hands on crash prevention training, which is very helpful for teen drivers whose crash risk is three times that of more experienced drivers. Unfortunately, the program is located in Massachusetts. Teens from Blind Brook High School attend In Control annually on a field trip subsidized by a local resident.

No matter how your child learns to drive, the most important thing is that he or she is a safe driver. Teens really do learn to drive from watching their parents, so driving the speed limit, refraining from driving distracted and generally being a safe driver will set the right example. Parents may be tempted to ‘fudge’ the NYS form certifying the young driver has completed 50 hours of driving before taking the road test. Before doing this, consider that the most dangerous time in a teen driver’s life is the first twelve months of independent licensure. Experience is key in being a good driver.

The DMV website and many other online sources will provide a template for a Parent Teen Driving Contract. You can also sign up for the TEENS program on the DMV website. By doing this, you will be notified if your teen has an accident or gets a ticket, which they “forgot” to tell you about. If all does not go well, it is important to remember that as the parent you have the right to withdraw consent for your teen to drive.

By Nan Berke and Ronny Hersch, SHS PTA Safety Committee Co-Chairs

