Information for Wakefield High School **Alive at 25!**

Teen Drivers: National Data from the Center for Disease Control (2006)

- Two out of five deaths among U.S. teens are the result of a motor vehicle crash.
- Teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash.
- In 2002, the motor vehicle death rate for male occupants ages 16 to 19 was nearly twice that of their female counterparts.
- In 2003, 54% of teen deaths from motor vehicle crashes occurred on Friday, Saturday or Sunday and 42% occurred between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.

Teen Risk Factors: (CDC 2006)

- Crash risk is particularly high during the first year that teens are eligible to drive.
- The presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk of unsupervised teen drivers with the risk increasing by the number of teen passengers.
- Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed, run red lights, make illegal turns, ride with an intoxicated driver and drive after using alcohol or drugs.
- Teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use.

Wake County Public School System Teen Fatality Data (July 1995-March 2006)

- Two thirds of all accidental deaths of WCPSS students between 1995 and 2006 were traffic related.
- Thirty seven percent of all traffic accidents causing at least one death during 1995-2006 involved high school drivers.
- Fifty percent of all traffic related student fatalities occurred in vehicles with teen drivers.
- More than half of the fatal accidents with teen drivers involved unsafe driving practices.

The alarmingly high fatality rate of teen drivers, their passengers and others involved account for only a fraction of teen traffic accidents that involve property damage and injury. Inexperience and poor judgment, due to a variety of factors, account for most of teen traffic accidents. Unfortunately, age and passing a driver's education course and driving test do not adequately prepare young drivers to safely negotiate the physical and social highways of driving in a potentially lethal machine. Learning to drive is a process that takes time and experience.

The process of teaching a teenager to drive a car should be approached with vigilance and protectiveness. The consequences of not doing so can and are too often devastating.

Teaching a teen to be a responsible and safe driver should start long before age 15. It is important that parents remember that their job is to protect their children and teach them what they need to know to make good decisions. Some ways to accomplish this include the following:

- Modeling safe driving behavior and attitude
- Having discussions with their children about safe driving and providing accurate information
- Supervising their children and their driving—Getting to know who their friends are and what they are doing
- Assessing driving situations/conditions and providing adult drivers in high risk situations
- Setting and enforcing age appropriate and experience level restrictions
- Providing a safe vehicle for teens to drive—Avoid cars that roll over easily, do poorly in crashes, etc.
- Teaching responsibility--Expect their children to act responsibly (in all areas) and provide appropriate privileges and consequences
- Impressing on them the magnitude of responsibility required to drive safely for themselves, their passengers and others on the road
- Being a parent rather than a friend

Ultimately, the responsibility of safe driving is on the driver. Students who want the privilege of driving need to take their responsibility very seriously and realize that their actions behind the wheel can result in debilitating injuries and/or death for themselves and others.

Safe driving practices include, but are not limited to the following:

- Observing the speed limit
- Driving slower and more cautiously in risky conditions
- Driving defensively and being alert to other vehicles on the road
- Keeping both hands on the wheel—No cell phones while driving
- Always wear seat belts – front **AND** back seat passengers
- Never driving or riding in a car with a driver who has been drinking
- Limiting the number of teen passengers in the car
- Avoiding high peer pressure situations to be unsafe
- Respecting the inherent dangerous nature of a motor vehicle
- Remembering that you, as the driver, are responsible for the safety and lives of you and your passengers
- Honoring your parents rules—They only want to keep you safe and alive

Unfortunately, it too often takes a tragedy with someone close to home for all of us to realize the consequences of less than cautious driving practices. The tragedy that our community is currently dealing with is not new to us; and we seem to forget the devastating consequences all to soon. Therefore, we need to learn from this and turn it into a teachable moment that will help us all remember, so that we can prevent it from happening again.

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