

Juvenile Assessment Center  
of Lee County  
2107 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.  
Fort Myers, FL 33901  
(239) 258-3450  
www.swfjac.org

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# The JAC Perspective



*The Juvenile Assessment Center of Lee County ... assisting youth and their families to seek the treatment and programs they need to lead productive, crime free lives.*

Free drug testing kits are available at the JAC 24 hours a day for parents to use with their youth.

**Law enforcement should call ahead to**

**258-3461  
or 258-3471**

**when bringing an arrested youth to the JAC or to confirm that a youth is eligible for a civil citation.**



The JAC of Lee County is operated by the Lee County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

## Know the Risks for Young Teen Drivers



Florida Statutes provide for a graduated drivers licensing policy for teens. A youth may obtain a learner's permit at age 15 in Florida. During the first 90 days with a learner's permit the youth may only drive during daylight hours (and only with a licensed driver who is at least age 21). After 90 days the youth may drive up to 10 p.m. (still supervised). At age 16 and with at least a year of experience driving with a learner's permit, plus no traffic convictions, a youth is eligible to get an intermediate license. With an intermedi-

ate license at age 16 a youth may drive between the hours of 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. (unsupervised). At the age of 17 a youth may drive between 5 a.m. and 1 a.m. (See [www.flhsmv.gov/ddl/teendriv.html](http://www.flhsmv.gov/ddl/teendriv.html) for additional rules.) Leading injury prevention experts recommend even stricter drivers license policies for teens than what Florida requires. Here's why.

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of serious injury and death for U.S. teens.
- Teen drivers are nearly three times more likely than adult drivers to crash (per miles driven).
- The crash rates for 16 and 17 year olds are twice as high as they are for 18 and 19 year old drivers.
- The fatal crash rate of teens is four  
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## "How's My Driving?"

A father driving his son to school sips his coffee while weaving in and out to beat the morning traffic. "Did you get your report finished last night?" "Yes," the son answers from the passenger seat. The father checks to see if his son has remembered to bring his homework to school. The father's phone rings. He reaches down for the phone and looks at it to see who it's from. "I need to take this. It's important." The father answers the phone and continues to drive with one hand holding the phone, the other hand on the steering wheel. This father may not know it, but he has been giving his son a driving lesson. Teens learn to drive by watching their parents. In fact, their driver's education began the first day that their car seat was turned around to face the front of the car. While

parents may give their teens well intentioned lectures about safe driving, teens are far more influenced by what they have seen their parents do than by what they tell them to do. Teens who have seen careless or distracted driving by their parents will likely imitate it once they become drivers. Distracted behaviors by average drivers can increase the risk of a crash by a factor of nine. Teenager's distracted driving, in combination with their inexperience, increases their risk of a crash even more. It is important for parents to model and to discuss safe driving years before teens get behind the wheel. Behaviors to avoid while driving include reaching for objects, talking on the phone, texting,  
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## Know the Risks for Young Teen Drivers (cont.)

times as high at night compared to daylight hours. Most of these crashes occur between 9 p.m. and midnight.

- Fifty-four percent of deaths of teenage passengers are in vehicles driven by another teenager.
- For 16 and 17 year olds, the risk of being killed in a crash increases with each additional passenger in the car under age 21. A single young passenger increases the chances of a deadly crash by 44%.

Parents may wish to consider how

recommendations for teen drivers licensing policies from national injury prevention experts differ from Florida Statutes when deciding how to navigate this rite of passage with their own teens. National injury prevention experts recommend a minimum age of 16 for a learner's permit, no unsupervised night driving from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. with an intermediate license, and allowing a maximum of one teen passenger to accompany the driver unless there is adult supervision.

Household rules that parents set up for teen drivers can help to fill

in the gaps in state laws. Research confirms that when parents set rules for their teen drivers and take an active role in monitoring and managing their teen's driving, teens have lower accident rates. An internet search for "teen driver contract" will turn up a number of helpful sources to assist parents in setting up household rules for young drivers. One example of a teen driver contract is available from the American Academy of Pediatrics at [www.cdc.gov/ParentsAreTheKey/pdf/Parent\\_Teen\\_Driving\\_Agreement\\_a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ParentsAreTheKey/pdf/Parent_Teen_Driving_Agreement_a.pdf).

## Prepare Teens to Look Out for Their Own Safety and Welfare

Parents may do a good job of steering their teens toward age appropriate and supervised activities. However, sometimes even well intentioned and supervised youth activities can go awry due to a few bad actors. That's why it is important to help teens learn good decision making skills so that they have the ability to recognize bad or dangerous situations and know how to navigate them. Talk to teens about the importance of them taking charge of their own safety in deteriorating or unsafe situations. The first step is for them to learn how to recognize a bad or dangerous situation. Our brains are constantly processing information that we get through our senses about our environment. Our brains send us warning signs when our senses register a potentially bad or dangerous situation. Discuss with adolescents how their brain works differently during adolescence. Adolescents do receive "danger" warnings from their brain. However during adolescence their brain is wired

to seek out adventure and thrills. Their brain tends to want to ignore the warning signs of "danger." It wants to ignore thinking about the consequences during an exciting situation. Adults can help adolescents understand that the only acceptable decision when their brain alerts them to "danger" is to immediately leave the situation. Otherwise an adolescent risks getting swept up in the excitement of the dangerous or bad situation. Adults can discuss with adolescents strategies for leaving an unsafe or potentially bad situation. Parents may wish to help their teen develop a safety plan that includes a strategy for a parent or another trusted adult to come get them with "no questions asked" if they ever find themselves in a deteriorating, bad, or unsafe situation. Discuss with adolescents various strategies for dealing with situations that could put them at risk if they stay in that situation. Examples: they hear a friend talking about shoplifting while they are in a store together; they get

into a friend's car and smell alcohol or pot; they see friends start to destroy other people's property; they are at a community event or party and see kids starting to break the rules and get out of control; or they get into a friend's car and realize that the driver has been drinking. Discuss with teens what could happen if they stay in each of these situations. Discuss with them what they could say and do to navigate the situation. Parents can't always protect teens from being exposed to risky situations, but they can help them to learn skills to take charge of their own safety and welfare if needed.

## How's My Driving? (cont.)

checking social media, turning around to referee a back seat argument, applying makeup, eating, drinking, reading, or any activity that distracts the driver from watching the road. In some cases parents may need to admit to their teen that "this is something we both need to work on."