



Distractions

We all get distracted at times, that's only natural. Getting distracted when driving, however – even for a second – can have disastrous consequences.

Being completely focused on the driving task is something that all motorists need to do. It is an essential driving skill. This is especially important for our sons and daughters when they've recently passed their test.

During their time with an instructor in the passenger seat, they will have learnt to drive in a carefully managed environment where distractions were kept to a minimum.

It is when they get out on the road on their own that they are exposed to everyday distractions and all the potential dangers of driving without the calming influence of their instructor.

It can be compounded by the fact that young drivers often over-estimate their ability to control the car and think it's perfectly acceptable to multi-task when behind the wheel.

Dangerous distractions which can divert a young driver's attention most commonly include the following:

- ▶ **Using their mobile phone – talking, texting or calling**
- ▶ **Operating in-car devices such as IPods/CDs/Sat Navs etc**
- ▶ **Eating or drinking**
- ▶ **Smoking**
- ▶ **Playing their music too loud (a high energy track can make them drive faster without realising it!)**
- ▶ **Reading maps or written directions**
- ▶ **Doing their make up or hair**
- ▶ **Talking to friends**
- ▶ **Listening in to other conversations**

Some of these distractions might be unavoidable, such as talking to friends when driving and listening in to their conversations.

We strongly recommend, however, that they keep the number of passengers to a minimum in their first year of driving while they build up their experience.

Ideally they should not transport more than one person at any given time.



Research has proven that with **each additional passenger carried, the risk of being involved in a crash ALSO increases so the more passengers = the higher the risk.**

Apart from the obvious safety risk to themselves and others, they will also increase the likelihood of being stopped by the Police.

According to the Department for Transport, if the police witness 'poor driving' because the driver is distracted for whatever reason, they can prosecute under Regulation 104 of the Roads Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986.

The penalty is EXACTLY the same as it is for the offence of driving and using a hand-held mobile phone.

Once convicted in court they may face:

- ▶ **discretionary disqualification,**
- ▶ **a maximum fine of £1000**
- ▶ **three penalty points.**

If a fixed penalty notice is offered and accepted instead of court, then the penalty is three points and a fine of £60.

With any of these outcomes, their insurance premiums will become substantially higher.

It might be worth letting your son or daughter know that with the introduction of the New Drivers Act, they will AUTOMATICALLY lose their licence if they reach six penalty points within the first two years of passing their first driving test.

If they'd like to find out how the new Act could affect them, and how penalty points are calculated, they can visit:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/LearnerAndNewDrivers/NewlyQualifiedDrivers



So what else can you do to help?

Here are just a few tips on how to help your son or daughter avoid some of the common distractions and be a safer driver.

While many parents have told us that their adult children 'don't listen' to them...we all have considerably more influence than we might think:

- ▶ **If they still live at home, it's our rules that should apply!**

or

- ▶ **If we lend them the family car or assist with insurance premiums.**

So, leverage that influence...

Don't use a mobile

Tell them to turn their mobile off when driving. That way, they won't be tempted to answer an incoming call or text message or make a call themselves.

They need to remember that using a mobile when driving is illegal – talking on their phone and driving means they are four times more likely to be involved in a crash.

Don't smoke when driving

Encourage them not to smoke when behind the wheel. There are many potential distractions involved in lighting up and smoking when driving – getting the cigarette out of the packet, lighting it up, smoke drifting into their eyes and blurring their vision, hot ash or a half finished cigarette falling onto their lap ... the list goes on. That's why smoking is increasingly coming under the spotlight as a serious distraction when driving. Eating and drinking in the car can be equally dangerous as full attention isn't given to the driving task when doing these.

Avoid lengthy conversations

Where possible encourage them to avoid getting involved in lengthy conversations with their passengers; especially with those in the back seat as their natural instinct will always be to turn their head when talking to them. Arguments can be particularly distracting – so ask them to pull over and not drive off again until they can fully concentrate on their driving again.



Music is a distraction

Music can be a distraction too, either when searching for the right track or playing it too loud which can block out engine noise and the sound of traffic around them; leading to a sense of detachment from their surroundings. The style of music they chose can also affect their driving – a fast tempo played loud, can make them drive faster and miss driving cues such as red lights!

So what can they do to help themselves?

Encourage them to identify **what** distracts them, **when** they are more distracted than usual, and **who** distracts them so they can consciously limit these as much as possible.

If they want to do any of the above or just to read a map, take a call or adjust their hair or makeup, pulling over where it is safe to do so will help minimize the risks and stay on the right side of the law.