



A REVIEW OF PARENT/DRIVER AGREEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Parent/driver agreements are entered into by young drivers at the request of their parents, often in return for use of the family car or assistance in funding their own car. The agreements acknowledge that young drivers are at greater risk of crashing than any other age group and allow parents to initially impose strict limitations on their children's driving in high-risk driving conditions, for example at night or with teenage passengers.

An internet search for parent/driver agreements revealed that the vast majority of agreements available from the world wide web are American. The search revealed only one agreement in Britain and none elsewhere. A Road Safety Officer in Australia confirmed that parent/driver agreements are not used there. The sort of restrictions detailed in agreements are similar to restrictions involved in Graduated Licensing Systems (GLS). Many countries, or States within countries, have introduced some form of GLS, although the nature and content of the systems vary considerably. Countries that have GLS may not feel the need to use parent/driver agreements also. For example, whilst the search did not reveal that parent/driver agreements existed in New Zealand, a GLS operates in that country involving a 2 stage test and restrictions on alcohol, night-time driving and passenger carrying through the stages.

However, the United States of America embrace both GLS and parent/driver agreements. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia have enacted one or more GLS elements and thirty four states and the District of Columbia have a three-stage Graduated Licensing System.¹

PARENT/DRIVER AGREEMENTS IN BRITAIN

The internet search revealed only one agreement sourced in this country, it is promoted by BRAG, Bexley Road Safety Action Group and is available to download from their website.² It has been developed by young people for young drivers and their parents. The document is titled 'New Teenage Drivers:Safer Driving Agreement' and the agreement is prefixed with brief facts about the risks to young drivers and instructions on the use of the agreement. The Agreement is then divided into three sections; 16 pledges by the young driver, 11 pledges by their parent and a section on running costs to be negotiated and completed by both. The Agreement can be terminated once the young driver is 18 or can continue if the young driver agrees to that.

By entering the agreement the young driver agrees to a number of things, for example:-

- driver and passengers to wear seatbelts
- avoid distractions like fiddling with the stereo, mobile phone use and smoking
- avoid alcohol/drugs
- not allow others to drive the car.

The parent or carer also agrees to some conditions, for example:-

- collecting the young driver if they ring for a lift, no questions asked at the time
- serve as a good role model, always wearing a seatbelt
- not drive if have been drinking or ride with a driver who has been drinking
- always allow enough time for a journey

When contacted, BRAG, were not aware of other organisations in this country promoting driver agreements whether theirs or others.

PARENT/DRIVER AGREEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The internet search revealed 31 websites offering advice to young drivers (usually referred to as teen drivers) and/or giving an example of a teen/parent driving contract (the URL's are listed in appendix 1). Of those, six are solely dedicated to the issue of teen driving, with all but one giving an example of a contract to follow (the six are denoted in appendix 1) and most giving detailed and comprehensive advice backed by statistics. The six dedicated websites have been established by a variety of people; a psychologist specialising in family work, parents and commercial organisations.

Of the six dedicated websites, the 'I promise' programme and '4myteen.org.us' are both safe driving initiatives which follow similar principles to the 'How's My Driving' schemes that are emerging in this country. Both schemes involve payment of a fee which registers the young driver and provides a years monitoring service. A sticker is placed in the car with a telephone number on it and members of the community are encouraged to call in with compliments or complaints. These can of course be about the young driver or the parent, depending on who is driving at the time. The reports are sent back to the parent. Both schemes include an example of a safe driving contract. The 'I promise' programme is supported by a number of organisations including insurance companies, health promotion companies, parents associations and family help organisations all of whom include a summary of the programme and a link within their own website.

Four of the 31 websites are offered by insurance companies, these include advice to parents and young drivers. Several simply offer a family teen driving contract to download, whilst one has dedicated part of their website as a guide for parents which includes background facts and statistics, suggests ten ways to help and provides a worksheet to complete.³

Three television companies include teen driving contracts on their websites, one of whom, WB36 in Atlanta, has launched a teen driving education programme which includes regular tips to parents and features on young drivers. In addition there are several websites which focus on child health issues which include a driving contract, often coupled with information and support for parents.

The remainder of the driving contracts accessible from the internet are scattered around a variety of sites, ranging from motoring and safety organisations through to the website of a high school.

CONTENT OF THE AGREEMENTS

The length of the agreements available is quite varied, some run to four or five pages with upwards of fifteen clauses, others are simple one page 'skeletons' with general clauses that can be expanded if required. Some are a two-part agreement wherein both the teendriver and parent have conditions to comply with, others list only restrictions for the young driver but all are signed by both parties.

Many of the agreements include one or more of the following topics for the young driver within them:-

- Safety and Defensive Driving
- Seatbelts – both whilst driving, a passenger and ensuring passengers are wearing them
- Drinking and Driving – this often includes drugs, both illegal and prescription drugs that may affect ability to drive. A promise not to get in a car with another driver who is impaired through drink or drugs also often features in the agreement with an add on that the parent will collect their child in such a situation or pay for a taxi, no questions asked at the time.
- Curfew – aimed at ensuring the young driver avoids the riskiest times eg: night time, quite often these are graduated and increase with driving experience
- Passengers – a limit on how many friends the young driver may have in the car – often reviewable as experience increases
- Distractions – restrictions on smoking, using the stereo, eating, drinking and the use of a mobile phone
- Who may drive the car – usually just the young driver and not their friends
- Car maintenance and expenses – what the young driver is responsible for
- Destinations – this can include driving distance perimeters and frequency of trips
- What to do in an accident/emergency

Examples of clauses that appear in the parents section of the agreement are:-

- To act as a role model, eg: wear seatbelts, never drive drunk or impaired by drugs, obey the traffic laws
- To help the young driver in a calm, non-judgmental way and support the youngsters learning and experience
- Agree to accept a call for a lift or assistance at any time with no questions asked at the time
- To review the agreement from time to time

Many of the contracts are supplied with additional information and tips for parents which include advice for parents on negotiating a contract with their child, the sort of rewards for compliance with the contract and possible consequences of non-compliance.

ARE PARENT/DRIVER AGREEMENTS EFFECTIVE?

The ultimate aim of the agreements is to reduce the likelihood of a young driver being involved in a crash and therefore one measure of effectiveness is casualty reduction amongst the young driver age range. However this is difficult to evaluate, the agreements are voluntary not mandatory and although their use may be encouraged in a particular State, the exposure of young drivers to such agreements in any area will not be known or easily quantifiable. Therefore if there is a reduction in young driver/passenger casualties in an area where agreements are used there can be no certainty that this is solely attributable to the use of the contracts and the restrictions that they impose. Perhaps for these reasons there appears to be little or no evaluation of the effectiveness of parent/driver agreements.

One study in America looked at whether parent-imposed delayed licensure and restricted driving related to fewer teenagers engaging in risky driving behaviours.⁴ The results indicated that some parents did take an active role in their child learning to drive, ensured that their child did not take a driving test until 'ready' and limited their driving in terms of trip and risk conditions. Overall, the results indicated that a combination of being older at the time of gaining an unrestricted license and restricting driving under high-risk conditions may be an effective way to curb teenagers risky driving behaviours.

Research in America has established that more frequent parental supervision and restricted teen access to a car were associated with less likelihood of teens speeding and more likelihood of their using seat belts when driving.⁵

Using data from 300 adolescents who had held a driving license for two years or less, researchers found that low parental monitoring and control were related to risky driving behaviours, traffic violations and motor vehicle crashes among teens. Those adolescents with lenient restrictions, particularly in relation to carrying friends as passengers, were four times more likely to commit traffic violations and seven times more likely to crash than those with restrictions.⁶

Another study in America looked specifically at The Checkpoints Parent-Teen Driving Agreement and its use in Connecticut.⁷ The objective of the study was to look at the acceptability of the format and content of the agreement. The Agreement was piloted with a sample of 47 families recruited as their teenagers tested for a driver's licence. The study found that most families used and liked the agreement and most parents placed the recommended strict initial limits on their child's driving. Moreover, parents reported placing stricter limits on their child's driving than they had originally intended.

Parent/driver agreements often include the sort of restrictions that can be found in Graduated Licensing Systems (GLS). Evaluations conducted in countries which have introduced GLS reveal that in the majority of cases the GLS have been effective to some extent in reducing accident rates and casualties. It therefore seems fair to assume that parent/driver agreements, by addressing what are already known to be the riskier elements for younger drivers and increasing knowledge and awareness, are likely to be effective in casualty reduction.

APPENDIX 1

'Dedicated' parent/young driver websites

<http://www.parentingteendrivers.com/>
<http://www.4myteen.org.us/>
<http://www.ipromiseprogram.com/>
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>
<http://www.drivehomesafe.com/>
<http://www.pastnh.org/>

Media websites

<http://www.parent-teen.com/>
<http://www.wb36.trb.com/>
<http://www.additudemag.asp/>
<http://www.kltv.com/>
<http://www.ncbin.wnyt.com/>

Child Health sites

<http://www.caresproject.org/>
<http://www.healthtip.ucdavis.edu/ychytbasd.html>
<http://www.saferchild.org/driving>

Insurance Companies

<http://www.ohioinsurance.org/>
<http://www.lewisins.com/>
<http://www.collinsurance.com/>
<http://www.safeco.com/>
<http://www.angelfire.com/oh4/personalinsurance/teen>

State/school/county websites

<http://www.smtexas.org/>
<http://www.greenville.k12.sc.us/>
<http://www.houghtonsheriff.com/teen>
<http://www.ncdot.org/>

Safety sites

http://www.hwysafety.org/safety_facts/teens/beginning_drivers
<http://www.ncadd.com/addy/brochure/index>
<http://www.safetytips.com/>

Parental advice sites

<http://www.parentingteens.com/>
<http://www.kidscontracts.com/>

Others

<http://www.legalnews.net/driving>
<http://www.aaa.com/>
<http://www.teendrivers.com/>

¹ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety: US Licensing Systems for Young Drivers:2001

² <http://www.brag.org.uk/>

³ <http://www.safeco.com/teedriver>

⁴ Hartos et al: Do Parent-imposed delayed licensure and restricted driving reduce risky driving behaviours among newly licesed teens?: Prev Sci 2001: 2(2)113-122

⁵ Beck et al: Parental predictors of teen driving risk: Am J Health Behavior 2001: 25, p10-20

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- ⁶ Hartos et al: Can I take the car? Relations among parenting practices and adolescent problem driving practices: Journal of adolescent Research 2000:15:352-67
- ⁷ Hartos et al: Acceptibility of the Checkpoints Parent-Teen Driving Agreement: Prev Med 2001:21(2)138-141