Headline: Honing teen driving habits a challenge

Deckhead: Monitoring, spotting reckless patterns lessen odds of crash

Parental anxiety escalates when their teenage children begin driving. It’s a natural and expected reaction.

Operating a motor vehicle could be considered a child’s first responsibility that puts the lives of others at risk. Taking a defensive approach behind the wheel rarely is more important.

The steps are simple: Buckle seatbelts, put away smartphones, honor the speed limit and reduce distractions. It’s a map to a safe-driving experience.

Teenagers should be scrutinized. Their limited understanding of vehicles and the roads on which they are traveling could put them in precarious situations. Traffic serves as an added burden. Congested highways escalate the need for younger drivers to remain on the defensive.

This puts an added onus on parents to learn if their teenagers are prepared drivers. The more parents discover about their kids’ habits, the less likely they are to suffer collisions.

Parents shouldn’t ignore their kids’ driving habits. Riding with them provides an opportunity to observe their patterns. Are they accelerating through yellow lights, not using turn signals, failing to check blind spots, improperly merging into lanes or getting upset at other drivers? These are easily recognizable, but it’s only the beginning.

Young drivers rarely should be traveling with a group of passengers. Traveling with friends encourages teens to take more risks. Peer pressure might force them to drive faster than the speed limit or maneuver illegally on the roadways. Motorists, ages 16 to 17, increase their odds of being killed in an accident by 44% when traveling with an additional young passenger. That risk doubles with two passengers, and quadruples if three or more passengers are in the vehicle.

Technology makes cars more fun to drive, but at the expense of drivers losing their focus. Drivers too often make phone calls, answer texts in moving vehicles or check social-media sites. More than one-third of teens admit they respond to text messages while driving, and more than half answer phone calls.

Cars overflowing with fast-food wrappers is another sign. The drivers likely are eating while driving and paying lesser attention to the road.

Teen drivers breaking curfew restrictions is a red flag. Some states enforce laws that forbid drivers 18 and younger from operating cars between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. Those pushing curfew could be more likely to break speed limits and run stop lights to make it home in time.

It is essential drivers hear what is happening around them as well as see it. Teens blasting loud music diminish their ability to hear audible cues from other drivers, particularly a horn or another vehicle accelerating nearby.

Car accidents are a leading cause of death for teenagers. It’s impossible for parents to continuously monitor their children’s driving habits but identifying aggressive patterns should lessen the odds of an accident occurring.

Cutline: WHAT’S GOING ON? – Teenage drivers not paying attention behind the wheel could cause an accident or lead to a form of aggression. Image: pololia. Adobe Stock.