Headline: Emphasize safety during teen safety week

Deckhead: Parents should preach responsibility to kids behind wheel

Parents serve as role models to their children in a multitude of ways. The list is extensive and teaching proper driving habits should be near the top.

Driving could be considered a teen­ager’s initial step on the stairway to adulthood. It’s a responsibility to keep themselves and others among them from harm’s way.

It’s a skill that is honed, but never mastered. There is a threat of an acci­dent each time a driver gets behind the wheel. Those who embrace the respon­sibility proceed with caution and put themselves at lesser risk than those who fail to take the task seriously.

It’s not difficult to take driv­ing for granted and ignore safe hab­its. Defensive approaches should be stressed and accepted by teenagers.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) understands the concerns parents might have regarding their children’s driving rou­tines and has deemed October 15-21 National Teen Driver Safety Week.

The NHTSA advises parents to focus on alcohol consumption, inconsistent use of seat belts, distracted driving, speeding and driving with a passenger in the vehicle. Parents also should engage in safe-driving conversations year-round.

Impaired driving never should be tolerated. Teens are too young to pur­chase and consume alcohol, but that doesn’t stop them from getting into accidents. Thousands of teen driv­ers involved in fatal-car crashes have blood-alcohol-content levels higher than the legal limit of .08, according to the NHTSA.

But alcohol isn’t the only substance that impacts driving. Marijuana affects a driver’s ability to react. Teens should be reminded that driving under the influence of any impaired substance, including illicit or prescription drugs, could have deadly consequences.

Seat belts are a simple way to keep drivers and passengers safe, but too many don’t use them. NHTSA reports nearly 50% of teen passenger-vehicle drivers who die in car crashes are not wearing seat belts.

It’s not difficult to become distracted while driving, but it’s never smart to be using cellphones, answering texts or browsing social-media sites while driving.

Speeding is another cause for teen drivers’ fatal-car crashes. Parents can’t stress enough the importance of driv­ing defensively. Adhering to speed lim­its is essential in keeping young drivers from harm’s way.

Research, meanwhile, has proved that teen drivers transporting passen­gers can dramatically increase the risk of fatal-car crashes. The likelihood of drivers engaging in risky behavior tri­ples with multiple passengers.

Parents can best influence their chil­dren’s driving behaviors by setting good examples. Never drive impaired. Seat belts should be fastened at all times, practice defensive driving, always obey the speed limit and limit the number of passengers.

National Teen Driver Safety Week is an ideal time to begin conversations with teen drivers for those who hav­en’t. Get creative with the dialogue. Send email or text reminders to deliver a message and stress its importance. Draft a parent-teen contract that out­lines the rules and consequences.

Driving is a privilege. Teens strug­gling to obey the rules might need to have their licenses taken away until they understand the importance of safety.

Cutline: GUIDING THE WAY – Parents always should be teaching their teenage kids to become safe and responsible drivers. Image: motortion. Adobe Stock.