



Caution: New drivers

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Young drivers account for one of five motor vehicle collisions with fatalities in

British Columbia. And these 16 to 21-year-old drivers account for only eight percent of all drivers in this province. ICBC statistics tell us that in 2005, 76 youth were killed in 70 car crashes and about 9700 were injured in 8000 crashes. The top contributors to these crashes were unsafe speed, and alcohol. It's a dangerous thing being a young driver, isn't it?

There are steps we can take to reduce the carnage. At the provincial level, graduated licensing is one response that has been proven to work. Parents also have an important role to play in preparing their teens for the responsibilities of the road.

BC's Graduated Licensing Program (GLP) was successful in reducing new driver crashes by 26% in its first two years. Studies from other jurisdictions that also use GLPs show similar results. In other words, graduated licensing works.

Graduated licensing extends the time and stages required in the process of acquiring a driving license. In BC, there are three basic stages. First is the Class 7L learner's permit which comes after passing a knowledge test. This allows a new driver (not all new drivers are 16 years old, the minimum) to drive with supervision and under some restrictions.

After a year in the learner stage, passing the Class 7 Road Test moves you from learner to novice driver (from the "L" to the "N" sticker). You can now drive without supervision, but again under restrictions such as zero alcohol and no more than one passenger.

Then comes the Class 5 Road Test after 24 months in the novice stage. Passing this one results in receiving full driver privileges, the Class 5 license.

That is the process from learner to licensed. Seems simple enough, but there is a great deal more going on. Once your teen has passed the knowledge test and has earned the privilege of becoming a learner on the road, a parent's role kicks up a few notches. The best first step is one parents should have taken long before their child became eligible: becoming a model driver. Imagine that your actions are always in view of your child when driving. That 'finger' you flashed just now and cutting that little sports car off are both messages you are sending about driving.

But let's say you are a good model, as most of us are. You will probably start off enrolling your teen in professional driver classes, but as good as that is, six to 10 hours of instruction only touch on the basics. You need to help your child to practice. Profession-

als suggest that a minimum of 50 hours is needed to make a competent, safe driver. Think of it this way: your son just finished swimming lessons... he's not really ready for the Canada Games, is he? Some of the driv-

ing he will face will put him into the 'big leagues' right away.

Parents in the supervising role during driving practice do not need to be experts — that was the role of the driving instructor. Your role is one of coach and resource as your teen gains experience behind the wheel.

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