



A Game Plan for Talking to
Your Student Athletes About New Jersey's
Graduated Driver License Program

Driving a car,

just like participating in sports, takes practice. You don't excel without building skill. Safety is also essential. Athletes recognize how risky it is to take to the field, the court or the ice without the proper training and equipment. But when it comes to driving, do your student athletes recognize the risk and responsibility that comes with a driver's license? Are they as well-versed in the rules of the road as the rules of game?



As a coach, you're looked up to and respected by your players. They trust you to provide guidance and instruction that will help them succeed both on and off the field. That's why initiating a discussion about the proven principles of New Jersey's Graduated Driver License (GDL) program is sure to help them up their game. The GDL program helps teen drivers build skill while minimizing those things that cause them the greatest risk. And that's critical because no other age group on the road has the highest crash risk and nothing claims more teen lives than car crashes.

Including every member of your team -- players, coaches, managers, parents, and even fans -- in the discussion is critical for ensuring that it's not only a winning season, but a safe one. Here's a game plan for discussing the GDL program with everyone on your team:

- Brush up on the basics of the GDL program (see next page for an overview).
- Include text about adhering to the GDL provisions, whether a driver or passenger, in your team's code of conduct that spells out the penalties for non-compliance (see page 4 for sample text). Secure buy-in and support from your administration.
- Meet with your team captains and coaches to review the basics of the GDL program and the text in your code of conduct. Reinforce their role not only as leaders on the field, but on the road. Make it clear that coaches and captains will be expected to serve as role models (for the GDL program and all motor vehicle laws) and report any violations.
- Meet with your players and managers to review the basics of the GDL program and have your team captains review the GDL section in the code of conduct.
- Attend a parent/booster club meeting prior to the start of the season or as soon afterward as possible to review the basics of the GDL program stressing that their sons' and daughters' safety, both on and off the field, is your top priority. Distribute copies of the code of conduct and have your team captains review the GDL section.
- Regularly remind players and parents to make provisions for transportation if there are games and/or practices that could necessitate driving between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. (the GDL curfew).
- Include information about the GDL program and your team's commitment to teen safe driving in game programs, on field and/or gymnasium signage, and via public address announcements.
- Partner with your police department to reinforce student athlete compliance with the GDL program and all motor vehicle laws.

The basics of the GDL program

No trick plays here, the GDL program is a three-step process designed to help teens gain experience and build skill while minimizing those things that cause them the greatest risk -- distraction caused by passengers and the use of cell phones and other devices, driving late at night, and driving or riding unbelted. Here's a game-winning strategy for helping teens be safe on the road.



Step 1/Permit

A teen may obtain a permit at 16 years of age after successfully passing a written test and completing 6-hours of behind the wheel training. The permit allows a teen to practice driving in New Jersey only when supervised by an adult who has at least three years of licensed driving experience. A permit holder may not drive between the hours of 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., and only one other passenger, in addition to the supervising adult, may be in the vehicle. Additionally, a red GDL decal must be displayed on the front and rear license plate when the teen is behind the wheel. Any violation of these provisions carries a \$100 fine, but no motor vehicle points.

Step 2/Probationary License

Once a teen is at least 17 years of age and has held a permit for at least 6 months, s/he may take the behind the wheel driving test to obtain a Probationary License. This allows the teen to drive without supervision, but with the following provisions:

- *may only transport one passenger (unless a parent or guardian is in the vehicle or the passengers are the teen's dependent children)*
- *may not drive between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. (exemption provided for work and religious obligations, with proper documentation)*
- *may not use any hand-held or hands-free electronic devices (iPods and GPS devices may be used if they are set-up prior to driving)*
- *everyone in the vehicle must be properly restrained in seat belts or car seat seats (if under 8 years of age or less than 80 pounds)*
- *must display the red GDL decal on the front and rear license plate when behind the wheel*

Any violation of these provisions carries a \$100 fine, but no motor vehicle points.

Step 3/Basic License

Once the teen is at least 18 years of age and has held a Probationary License for at least 12 months, s/he may return to the Motor Vehicle Agency to obtain a basic or unrestricted license. It's the teen's responsibility to do this; teens who fail to change their license continue to drive under the GDL program and may be stopped and cited by a police officer if they're violating the provisions noted under step 2.

A Note About the GDL Decal

Being able to identify a teen driver holding a Probationary License is the single most vexing issue for those responsible for administering and enforcing the provisions of the GDL program. Requiring a GDL holder to display a decal has been a long-held and highly effective practice in Canada, the U.K., Australia, Germany, Japan, and many other countries. Contrary to what has been reported in the press, police are not arbitrarily stopping vehicles and harassing teens displaying the decal (they must have probable cause to make a stop) and an April 2011 reported issued by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General found that teen safety has not been negatively impacted by the requirement. Decals may be obtained from Motor Vehicle Services at a cost of \$4 per pair.

Why does the GDL program work?

The GDL program addresses those things that cause the greatest risk for teens -- passengers, cell phones, improper restraint, and nighttime driving. Since New Jersey's GDL program was enacted in 2001, teen driver crashes, injuries and fatalities have fallen to record lows.



Consider this, the number one cause of teen crashes in New Jersey is distraction and inattention. While cell phones and texting clearly pose a danger for teens (and adults as well), passengers also distract novice drivers. A teen driver is twice as likely to be killed in a crash while carrying just one passenger regardless of whether the passenger is a friend or sibling. Allow two or three passengers in the vehicle and the crash risk goes up 158% and 207%, respectively.

When it comes to driving at night, 40 percent of teen driver fatal crashes occur between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. And while this is a generation that has grown up with car seats and seat belts, teens are less likely to buckle up. Ensuring that teens are properly restrained is critical since mile for mile they are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers.

Teens are at the highest risk of being involved in a car crash during their first 12 to 24 months of driving. Last year, there were 49,000 teen-related crashes on New Jersey's roadways that claimed the lives of 19 teen drivers and 14 teen passengers (driven by their peers). While this number has dropped by more than 50% since 2001, one crash, one injury, one death is simply one too many.

Finally, parents play a crucial role in teen driver safety. Teens who report having parents that set rules and monitor their activities in a helpful, supportive way are half as likely to be in a crash, 71% less likely to drive intoxicated, 30% less likely to use a cell phone when driving, and 50% more likely to buckle up. By partnering with parents, you can help to ensure that they know about and leverage the proven principles of GDL to help their teens gain skill and become good drivers for life.

Sample GDL Text for a Student-Athlete Code of Conduct

Having reviewed the provisions of New Jersey's Graduated Driver License (GDL) program with my teammates and coaches, I understand the risks and responsibilities associated with driving. Whether I am operating a motor vehicle or riding in one as a passenger, I will adhere to the provisions of the GDL program and all motor vehicle laws. Recognizing that my individual safety as well as that of my teammates is paramount, I will notify a coach or school official if I observe a teammate violating the provisions of the GDL program and/or a motor vehicle law(s). I also understand that if I am observed violating the GDL program and/or a motor vehicle law(s), thereby putting myself and others at risk, my parents will be notified and I will be suspended from play for a minimum of ___ games/days/weeks. Any subsequent violation of the GDL program and/or a motor vehicle law(s) will result in my suspension from play for the remainder of the season (or a specified time period).

The following online resources can help you, your student athletes, coaches, managers, parents, and fans learn more about teen safe driving and New Jersey's GDL program:

www.ugotbrains.com
(for teens)

www.njteendriving.com
(for parents)

www.njdrivereducation.com
(for educators)

www.Facebook.com/GDL4U
(maintained by the New Jersey Teen Safe Driving Coalition)