

## **Seat Belts, Distractions, and Speed – Talk With Your Teens**

Learning how to drive and getting a license is an exciting time for teens, but it is imperative that they understand the risks associated with driving. Car crashes are the number one killer of teens in Sonoma County. The most common factor in teen crashes are driver error, speeding, teen passengers, alcohol use, night driving, and lack of seat belts.

Inexperience and distractions are key contributors to teen car crashes. Fifty eight percent of teens are involved in a crash within the first year of learning to drive. Distractions are a major factor in almost 80% of all collisions (eating, texting, cell phone use, changing the radio or music).

Speed and seat belt use are also key issues for teen drivers. Speed is the primary cause of collision for more than 40% of the fatal and injury car crashes by 16 and 17 year olds in Sonoma County, significantly higher than the California average. Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. In 2005, 10% of high school students reported they rarely or never wear seat belts when riding with someone else. Seat belts reduce the likelihood of fatal or serious injuries by 50%.

Talk to your teen about these risks. It is extremely important that they always buckle up their seat belts, follow the posted speed limit, and slow down for road conditions. Also talk about the new cell phone law effective July 1, 2008, and restrictions during the Provisional License period.

Need for Control: Downshift is a peer-led campaign at twelve of the largest high schools in Sonoma County. Monthly rallies during the 07-08 school year remind teens to reduce speed and distractions while driving or riding in a vehicle. Each teen turning 16 receives a safe driving kit, with items and information to help stay safe on the road. Most of the schools also participated in the Impact Seat Belt Challenge during the months of March and April, 2008. For more information, please refer to the Provisional License Action Network's (PLAN) website at [www.teensanddriving.org](http://www.teensanddriving.org)

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