Lesson 3: Mastering Driving Skills

You will need plenty of practice handling a moving vehicle. Following are specific driving skills you should practice with your parents in a vehicle.

Parent’s Tip: Take your teen to practice in a safe location, such as an empty parking lot, before moving to a roadway. Do not teach shortcuts or improper procedures.

Starting and Stopping

Acceleration should be slow and smooth. This will take practice. Pressure should be applied to the pedal with the ball of the foot instead of the whole foot.

Slowing down and/or stopping should also be steady and smooth. Practice easing the ball of the foot off of the gas pedal and gently applying the brake pedal in the same manner. Smooth, steady deceleration is used during normal driving conditions, however, being able to brake quickly is also important for emergency situations. Firm steady, pressure should be used with anti-lock brakes.
Maintaining Steady Speed
Practice keeping the vehicle at an appropriate, steady speed and periodically check the speedometer. Head checks can also be practiced while the vehicle is moving slowly to get a feel for how to safely look away from the driving lane to check for objects on the sides and behind the vehicle.

Turning
The recommended driver hand position is 9 and 3 o’clock. Because the hands are never on the top of the steering wheel, this position allows for more control of the steering wheel. This means less chance of injury to the face by the hands and arms in a frontal crash where the vehicle is equipped with a driver side air bag.

Use both hands in a hand-over-hand motion for turns. Hold onto the wheel and move the hand opposite the direction you’re turning toward the other hand. For example, if you’re turning to the right, your left hand will hold onto the wheel and move the wheel to the right. When your left hand gets to 3 o’clock, take your other hand and cross it over the one holding onto the wheel. Grab onto the wheel at the position your other hand just left. Continue this motion until the turn is complete. In the case of a right hand turn, your right hand will cross over your left and grab the steering wheel at 3 o’clock.
Practice:
• Using the correct turn signal about 100 feet before the turn or intersection.
• Placing the vehicle in the proper lane.
• Checking traffic in all directions.
• Slowing down or stopping prior to the turn.
• Yielding to other vehicles and pedestrians.

Backing Up
When it is necessary to back the vehicle into a parking space or out of a driveway, always:
• Check for traffic, pedestrians, parked cars and low stationary objects behind you.
• Turn your head to look out the rear window. Don’t rely on your mirrors.
• Place your right arm at the back of the passenger seat and look through the rear window. Place your left hand at the top of the steering wheel. When you want to change directions, move your left hand in the direction you want the rear of the car to go.
• Make small corrections to the steering wheel.
• Keep your foot in light contact with the brake while the car is moving backward (ride the brake).
• Glance quickly to the front and sides to check traffic then continue looking through the rear window as you brake smoothly.
• Never back up faster than a walking pace. When you get close to an object, back up inch by inch.

Changing Lanes
When changing lanes, always put the turn signal on prior to repositioning the vehicle to give other drivers plenty of warning. Be sure to check for traffic on all sides, checking for blind spots and motorcycles, before slowly repositioning the vehicle in the lane.

Off-Road Recovery
When a car runs off the road, many drivers initial response is to panic and overcorrect causing the driver to lose control of the car. Do not practice this activity but be aware of the steps that should be taken if the vehicle should travel off the roadway:
• Remain calm; don’t panic and overcorrect.
• Keep a firm grip on the wheel.
• Ease off the gas and stay off brake.
• Turn your wheel 1/8 turn to the left.
• When you feel your tires hit pavement again, turn when 1/4 turn to the right.
• Ease back onto the roadway.

Intersections
Intersections can be dangerous places for new drivers. There is a lot of activity and rules to remember when traveling through an intersection. Always slow down, look both ways, and check for oncoming traffic and pedestrians. Be prepared to stop or get your vehicle out of the way.

Right of Way
At a four-way stop, the vehicle arriving first should have the right of way. Come to a complete stop and proceed with caution. If
unsure who has the right of way, use eye contact and communication with the other drivers and proceed with caution when it is safe to do so. At an intersection without a stop sign or traffic signal, yield to vehicles coming from the right.

**Always yield to:**
- A blind pedestrian crossing the street or highway guided by a dog or carrying a white cane.
- A school bus picking up or dropping off children.
- Any emergency vehicle using sirens and/or flashing lights.
- Railroad crossings. Trains cannot stop in time to avoid hitting a vehicle.

**Merging in Traffic**
The right of way belongs to the moving traffic. Other drivers are not required to change lanes to allow vehicles to enter. When allowing other vehicles to merge, if it is safe, change lanes to allow the vehicle room to merge. Check mirrors and blind spots, and use the turn signal if it is safe to change lanes. If it is unsafe to change lanes, it may still be possible to accelerate or decelerate to allow others to merge (provided it is safe to do so).

**Passing Other Vehicles**
Only pass other vehicles when it is absolutely safe to do so. Use extreme caution when passing on a two-lane highway. Do not pass on a hill, curve, no-passing zone or a construction or work zone. Use care when passing a pedestrian or cyclist. Slow down and wait for a safe opportunity. Make sure you can clearly see ahead to determine if there is oncoming traffic before passing. Do not speed up when being passed. Move a little to the right and be prepared to slow down if the passing driver suddenly views a problem ahead while passing.
Parent’s Tip: Have your teen practice passing on a multi-lane highway (two lanes going the same direction) before passing on a two-lane highway.

Large Trucks
Never linger alongside a large truck or bus. These types of vehicles have a blind spot or “No-Zone.” If you can’t see the driver’s face in the side-view mirror, the driver does not know that there is a vehicle along side his truck or bus.

Nighttime Driving
After a driver has mastered the basic driving skills during the day, they may begin learning night driving skills. Nighttime driving requires motorists to drive more slowly since the visibility is reduced in all directions. Headlights should be on between sunset and sunrise.
Lesson 3 Checklist

Starting and stopping
☐ Starts and stops smoothly
☐ Keeps speed consistent
☐ Checks blind spots

Turning
☐ Signals and slows for all turns
☐ Checks all directions for traffic
☐ Yields to pedestrians and oncoming traffic if appropriate
☐ Enters turning lane if available

Backing
☐ Checks all around vehicle before moving
☐ Periodically checks behind and in front of vehicle
☐ Maintains slow speed

Changing lane and passing
☐ Checks mirrors and blind spots before changing lanes
☐ Uses turn signal before changing lanes
☐ Does not tailgate before passing other vehicles
☐ Before passing, checks mirrors and blind spots
☐ Rechecks mirrors again
☐ Uses turn signal before pulling out to pass
☐ Changes lanes smoothly
☐ Allows safe distance before returning to the appropriate driving lane
☐ Does not pass when it is not safe

Merging
☐ Uses turn signal
☐ Yields right of way
☐ Checks mirrors and blind spots
☐ Enters proper driving lane when it is safe
☐ Adjusts to a safe distance between other vehicles
☐ Identifies a merging vehicle
☐ Changes lanes to allow a vehicle to merge, if safe

Other
☐ Able to maintain 3-4 seconds behind other vehicles, when possible
☐ Maintains vehicle position in the center of the lane
☐ Checks mirrors periodically
☐ Steers smoothly