

9TH GRADE: HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE DRIVING CONTRACT

This is not about driving.

That might surprise you, but it is the truth. This experience with your teenager signifies way more than just driving.

There is a shift in your relationship, where your teenager will spend much more time away from you than with you. When they drive a car, they experience their first significant amount of freedom.

That freedom also represents the first opportunity for you to gauge their moral compass. How will they handle making their own decisions apart from you?

- Will they be smart?
- Will they be safe?
- Will they fail miserably?
- Will they surprise you?

This Driving Contract is not about driving; it is about establishing a system for your teenager to both build trust and restore broken trust with you.

What your teenager wants more than anything is freedom. What you want more than anything is for them to be trustworthy. Therefore, if they earn your trust, you are unleashed to reward them with freedom.

This Driving Contract will give you the opportunity to do three very important things:

Teach your teenager how to safely operate a car

Communicate clearly to your teenager, so as to avoid confusion, about what your expectations for them are while driving

Establish a system to strengthen your relationship with them through both building and restoring trust

You should see this conversation about driving as nothing more than a huge ramp to a greater conversation (i.e. What is our plan for slowly giving to you the freedom of a young adult? What is our plan for restoring trust when it is broken?).

You are giving them more than a set of keys; you are giving them your trust. Don't miss this parenting opportunity that the Driving Contract offers.

Here are some very practical thoughts to set you up for success with the Driving Contract:

- Communicate to your teenager that this Driving Contract is mainly about establishing an opportunity to build trust and restore broken trust during the driving adventure.
- Completing a Driving Contract with your teenager will not magically prevent your teenager from making a mistake while driving, but it will create crystal clear communication and outline a plan for restoring broken trust.
- Blank spots are provided in the contract for you to add any expectations that you would like. Other potential expectations you might choose to add are: a statement that says parents, not the teenager, are owners of the car; a statement about whether or not you will allow your teenager to drive with passengers; a statement about “racing” or reckless driving; a statement about how loud to play the radio; a statement about eating while driving; or a statement about driving when they are emotional or upset.
- The portion of the contract that deals with consequences is left blank on purpose. If this is truly going to be a two-sided conversation, you should let your teenager be a part of the process of deciding consequences. You ultimately decide what they will be, but your teenager will be more likely to honor them if they helped to come up with them.
- We suggest that you do not allow siblings or others to be a part of this Rite of Passage, so that there is less distraction and more focus on your new driver.
- Display the Driving Contract in the house and give a copy to the teenager for them to keep.
- Make sure to follow up and communicate when trust is restored.
- If at all possible, make sure both parents are a part of this contract. If parents are separated or divorced, it would be a huge “win” if they were able to work together to complete this contract with their teenager. It would communicate a lot of security to the teenager as well.
- You might want to review, revise, and re-sign this Driving Contract each year around your teenager’s birthday to make sure that it remains relevant and builds clear communication, which is the purpose.
- Share with your teenager that the leading cause of death among teenagers is auto accidents. It accounts for over 1/3 of all teen deaths each year. Therefore, it is extremely important that they take safety seriously.