

With the holidays rapidly approaching, many teenagers will be behind the wheel visiting family and friend, and often copying the driving behavior of their parents. But, is that a good thing? Not necessarily.

New research from Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) and Liberty Mutual Insurance reveals an alarming example of do what I say, not what I do when it comes to distracted and dangerous driving. For example, 66 percent of teens believe their parents follow different rules behind the wheel than they set for their children, with approximately 90 percent of teens reporting that their parents speed and talk on a cell phone while driving.

### **Parent Driving Behavior**

Specifically, the survey found teens observe their parents exhibiting the following driving behavior at least occasionally:

- 91 percent talk on a cell phone;
- 88 percent speed;
- 59 percent text message;
- 20 percent drive after drinking alcohol; and
- 7 percent drive after using marijuana.

In addition, teens report that nearly half of parents (47 percent) sometimes drive without a seat belt.

### **What's the harm?**

Prior driving research from SADD and Liberty Mutual points out that parents are the number one influence on teen driving behavior.

### **Teen Driving Behavior**

Thus, it may be no surprise that teens repeat these driving behaviors in almost equal numbers to their parents:

- 90 percent talk on a cell phone;
- 94 percent speed; and
- 78 percent send text messages.

Also, 15 percent of teens report driving after using alcohol.

### **Modeling Driving Behaviors**

In short, the link between the observed and self-reported driving behaviors indicates that parents are modeling destructive driving and that their teens are following suit.

“These findings highlight the need for parents to realize how their teens perceive their actions,” says Dave Melton, a driving safety expert with Liberty Mutual Insurance and its managing director of global safety. “Kids are always observing the decisions parents make behind the wheel and may see unsafe driving as acceptable.”

### **Teens Can Influence Parents**

Similar to past data showing the power of teens to correct poor driving behavior by peers, the same holds true for a car being driven by their parents: nearly three-quarters (70 percent) of the teens surveyed reported that their parents listen to them and change their poor driving behavior when they point out dangerous driving practices.

Unfortunately, not many do.

So, job one is to empower young people to make their discomfort with unsafe driving known to drivers, whoever they are!

Keep an ongoing family dialogue about rules for the road that apply equally for everyone.

Indeed, more than a decade of research points to the potency of open, honest conversations between parents and teens ... conversations often made easier and more effective by the signing of behavior contracts that make clear the expectations for both sides.

The Parent/Teen Driving Contract is one such tool and is available for free at:  
[www.LibertyMutual.com/TeenDriving](http://www.LibertyMutual.com/TeenDriving)

This way, "Do as I say" becomes synonymous with "Do as I do."