

Design & Implementation of a Parent Guide for Coaching Teen Drivers

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Purpose In this randomized controlled study, the authors developed, implemented, and evaluated a theory-based Parent Guide to enhance teen drivers' safety, particularly at their early-independent driving phase. The Guide was intended to facilitate parent-teen communication and motivate parents to plan and oversee driving hours that transitions from simple to more complex over time, providing a diversity of driving practice.

Background With graduated licensing, when a teen takes the wheel alone the period immediately following supervised driving is the riskiest phase for a crash. Graduated driver licensing can reduce the risk in-part. However, there is a lack of information on effective ways to provide parent supervision in order to promote teens' subsequent driving safety. This study adds research to the few parent-targeted programs focusing on parent attitudes and behaviors during the learner license phase of teen driving.

Methods Parent guide content was determined using a modified Delphi method to gather input from a panel of 12 driving safety experts. Further, in order to present the material in a user-friendly way, three focus groups were conducted with 21 parents. Once the Guide was in its final tabbed booklet format, 186 parent-teen dyads were recruited and randomly assigned to a study group to use the Parent Guide, or a control group to use the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) booklet available at the time. Survey data were collected from parents and teens at baseline, posttest (immediately following completion of practice driving,) and at 3 months after posttest.

Findings The Parent Guide was accepted and used more often than the MDOS booklet. Significantly more teens reported that their parents used the Parent Guide than the MDOS booklet (65% vs. 44%). Parents reported that the Guide helped them with planning driving practice, stress management, and strategies to keep calm. Parents in the control group reported that their booklet helped explain rules. Preliminary, short-term outcomes on teens' risky driving behavior showed no significant difference in the parent or teen self-reported risky driving behavior at the 3-month follow-up survey.

Discussion While this evaluation did not show significant difference in teens' risky driving behavior through parent use of an enhanced Guide, the study did demonstrate a positive change in parent behavior through use of the Parent Guide. The Guide was intended to motivate parents to communicate with their teens and supervise practice that moved from simple to complex over time. The evaluation showed that as opposed to the MDOS booklet, parents in the study group felt that the features most liked or most helpful related to those around increasing communication and practice complexity. Further research may benefit from focusing on promoting parent motivation and drawing on theories of motivation to encourage variation in driving practice.

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