

Distracted Driving: Improving Young Driver's Road Safety



The majority of drivers today engage in some kind of distracting behaviour each time they get behind the wheel.

Why This Matters

There is growing concern about the heightened risk of cellphone use while driving, particularly among young drivers. Because young drivers are already at greater risk of automobile accidents than others, anything that might negatively impact their ability to focus on the road is problematic. Significant statistical data has illustrated the clear connection between fatal car accidents and having a driver who was distracted.

What the Research Says

- ❖ The Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators indicates that in 80% of collisions, the driver had looked away from the road 3 seconds prior to the crash (CCMTA, 2014).
- ❖ One study reports that as many as 95% of young drivers have sent text messages while driving even though they acknowledge the risks (Atchley et al., 2011).
- ❖ If parents are engaging in distracted driving behaviours, it is likely that their children will learn that these behaviours are acceptable. Parents are encouraged to model safe driving behaviour, and to establish clear expectations and consequences about distracted driving.

Young People and Distracted Driving

- ❖ Most young drivers seem to be aware of the risks of distracted driving. Yet, young people receive great value from using their phones while driving, and knowing the risks doesn't seem to influence them greatly.
- ❖ There is a pattern of early and heavy technology use for many young people today, which further normalizes this kind of distraction.
- ❖ In general, young people will engage in behaviours that are seen as normal, even when these could be potentially dangerous.
- ❖ Researchers are proposing a shift in focus for intervention and prevention efforts toward societal norms. Better understanding of the beliefs and attitudes underlying this behaviour would shift the traffic safety culture in a healthier direction (Road Safety, Canada, 2011).

What You Need To Know

- ❖ There is no single path to change the road safety landscape, but rather, a need to continue combining strategies so that drivers are receiving messages about safe driving from multiple angles.
- ❖ Laws deterring distracted driving may be helpful, yet without complimentary intervention efforts, these deterrents likely won't change the overall landscape of road safety.
- ❖ Since young people are most commonly communicating through social media like Facebook and Instagram, effective campaigns should use these mediums to reach young drivers.

With collaborative, creative, and multi-dimensional efforts at the family, community, and cultural level, significant social behavioural shifts and a safer driving climate will eventually follow.

Atchley, P., Atwood, S., & Boulton, A., (2011). The choice to text and drive in younger drivers: Behavior may shape attitude. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 43, 134–142.
Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA) (2014) Use of Electronic Communication Devices by Canadian Drivers: Combined Urban/Rural.
Road Safety In Canada (2011). Government of Canada.

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