

# PARENT'S GUIDE TO DRIVING LESSONS

## ***The way people learn to drive is evolving...***

Your son or daughter is learning to drive. Even though it may feel like yesterday when they were little, and you wanted to protect them from everything, they are still your child and their safety is of paramount importance.

Being killed in car crashes is the second biggest killer of teenagers, second to suicide. It's a sad fact that 17-25 year olds are more likely than any other age group to die on our roads.

This is why we, as driving instructors, take our responsibility of teaching people to drive very seriously. Assuming you have a driving licence, it may well have been some years ago that you passed your own driving test. So, we've produced this leaflet to explain how driver training is changing to help drivers become safer, and so that you know exactly what to expect from your son or daughter's driving lessons.

Over the years, road layouts have become more complex, the volume of traffic has increased significantly and everyday driving can be challenging. Not only has your son or daughter got to be able to deal with these busier and more complex situations in order to gain a driving licence, they have to pass a longer and more challenging driving test, too. They'll need to demonstrate basic mechanical and safety knowledge by answering two questions (one of which is asked on the move). They will be asked to drive independently following directions from a satnav (or possibly road signs) for a significant portion of the driving test. They will also be asked to complete a reverse manoeuvre and possibly an emergency stop.

## ***An active learning approach is more engaging and interesting for the learner. It keeps them motivated and ensures they become a fully aware, safe and responsible driver...***

Research seems to show that *passive* learning, where the instructor is in charge of the entire learning process, isn't really the best way to produce safe drivers. The new driver will often find it difficult to know what to do when they encounter any new situations when they are out on the roads alone.

For this reason, many instructors now use an *active* learning approach. This will encourage your son or daughter to become a 'thinking driver'. They may be encouraged to say what they want to work on, whether this is something on the syllabus or just a need to feel more comfortable and confident with a particular task. They will be encouraged to reflect on situations and mistakes and encouraged to work out for themselves what they could do better next time.

An *active* learning approach stimulates the learner to take more responsibility for their learning. They become more aware of their skill level, strengths and weaknesses, and can often learn much quicker than when taught through traditional, more passive tuition methods. More importantly, it encourages them to problem-solve so that they are able to deal with any situation that they encounter once they're out on the roads alone.

## ***'Real' driving skills are an essential part of learning to drive...***

Another way we can help build confident, safe driving is to allow your son or daughter to experience 'real' driving situations. While learning the skills on the driving syllabus, more advanced driving elements can be introduced at the same time, or independently. The wider the experience your son or daughter gets on lessons, the more confident they will feel going in for their test, and the more prepared they will feel for driving on the roads solo.

Rest assured, it won't take any longer for your son or daughter to be test ready. If anything, they are more likely to be test ready sooner.

Example	Why?
<b>Programming the satnav</b>	Following guidance from a satnav may be a part of their driving test, but it's also a good idea to get them used to programming it for destinations they are likely to visit, understanding its terminology, and knowing what to do if they go the wrong way.
<b>Independent route planning and driving</b>	This may be on their driving test too, but their instructor may stretch them further than the regular test requirements, such as asking them to plan the route for the lesson and maybe even navigate their way to places they'll visit when they drive solo. They'll be encouraged to use signs whenever they are available, rather than relying on their instructor's directions or a satnav.
<b>Freestyle manoeuvres</b>	They've turned down a cul-de-sac, took a wrong turning or missed the junction they meant to take - how are they going to get out or turn back? Instead of the instructor telling them what they need to do, they'll be encouraged to problem-solve and decide independently where and how to turn around in the safest, most appropriate way.
<b>Fast Food Drive-Throughs</b>	These can be really narrow with damage-inflicting high kerbs and metal posts; do they really want to bash their first car (or yours!) the first time they order a burger?
<b>Filling up</b>	It's a good idea to make sure they know the importance of using the correct fuel, how to fill up safely and how to avoid spraying the forecourt with petrol!
<b>Music</b>	Listening to music, talk radio channels or audiobooks can be a distraction. Why not learn how to manage that level of distraction during driving lessons?
<b>Driving with passengers</b>	The additional weight from carrying additional passengers can affect the handling of the car. Also, passengers can be quite distracting - it's good to experience this type of distraction whilst learning so that they can develop safe strategies to manage it.
<b>Advanced parking skills</b>	Not just how to reverse into a bay or drive forwards in empty car parks; they could be asked to park in between two cars in busy car parks and navigate the tight turns and steep ramps of multi-storey car parks, too.

### ***Here's a summary of the benefits of active learning for the learner driver...***

- They will feel able to make safe decisions for themselves
- They become more responsible for the outcome of those decisions
- They will have a more realistic appraisal of their ability and skill level
- They will learn quicker and as a result possibly take fewer lessons
- They will feel better prepared and more self-confident for driving solo

### ***With more of an active learning style, the driving instructor may...***

- Ask the learner what they feel they are doing well with and what they feel they want to improve on – sometimes the learner may appear to be doing things well, but if they don't feel confident or are anxious, their instructor can help them by exploring what they're thinking and how they're feeling.
- Ask the learner for their input on what they want to work on – this may be something listed on the syllabus or something they feel they need to achieve, like getting onto roundabouts without panicking!
- Encourage the learner to learn from their mistakes, to challenge them to work out how to do things better next time – this is a quicker way of learning so that mistakes are not repeated as often.

Lessons are structured with the learner's best interests in mind, so the driving instructor will work with them to find out how they learn best. If your son/daughter would prefer the traditional instructor-led way of being taught, then that's fine. They just need to let their instructor know and the lessons can be adapted accordingly.

Whichever approach your son or daughter prefers, their instructor will always be aiming to help them become the best and safest driver they possibly can be.

## ***What you can do to help...***

Times have changed, and although you may recall how few lessons it took you to pass your test, the more difficult test requirements and increasingly demanding road conditions have pushed up the average amount of hours taken to pass the test.

Research has shown that the average number of hours with a driving instructor prior to passing the test is 47 (and an additional 20 hours private practice, too)\*. Do remember that this is only an average – some will pass much sooner than this, and others may take longer. Young adults generally learn quicker than older age groups and as a result tend to pass with fewer hours. But as with everything, some will take to driving more naturally than others, and some will have specific needs which might mean learning to drive takes a little longer than average, too.

The most important thing is that your son or daughter is safe and competent on the roads – you can't put a price on their life by expecting them to pass with only a few hours professional tuition.

You can help your son or daughter be successful in passing their test and in becoming a safe driver by:

- **Being encouraging** – they may feel like they're not learning fast enough or may be doubting their ability. Being positive and encouraging can give them the boost they need to break through.
- **Being patient** – Young people are often stressed enough with school/college work and pressure from their peers, so try to avoid adding extra pressure on them to learn faster. They will pass when they are ready, everyone is different and some will learn quicker than others.
- **Additional practice** – This can really help accelerate your son/daughter's learning. The more driving practice they get, the better they'll get and the quicker they'll learn. If you're worried about insurance, there are specialist companies that do 'bolt on' learner driver insurance cover which doesn't affect your existing policy.
- **Sit in on driving lessons** – We welcome you to sit in on lessons. Come and see how they're doing and offer your support, we're sure they'll appreciate it. It's also good to find out how things have changed and update yourself.
- **Be a good driver** – Yes, we all have bad habits! Could you make an effort to drive to your very best standard? Demonstration is a useful learning tool and we often hear how good a driver Mum or Dad are. Show them what you're doing and explain why whenever they're in the car with you.

Do you have any other questions about your son or daughter's lessons? Feel free to ask!

*\* These figures are from the Cohort II Study of Learner and New Drivers:*

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101007192957/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/research/rsrr/theme2/cohort2/cohortiiifindings.pdf>