

three and assigned to a Mustang and one of the drivers. After a brief orientation, they hit the asphalt; this particular DSFL site was in the parking lot outside of the U.S. Cellular Field ballpark near downtown Chicago.

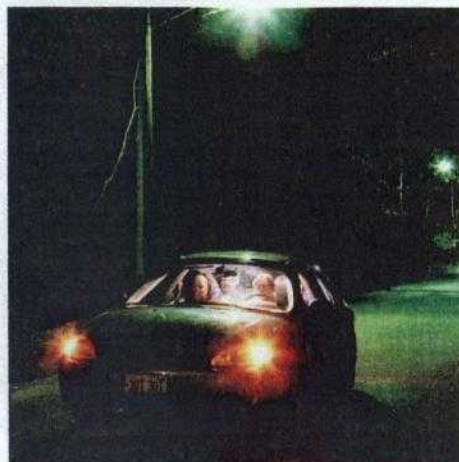
The training has three key themes: vehicle handling, hazard recognition, and space and speed management. In one exercise, students weave around a tightly coned course of turns and slaloms—first with no distractions, then a second time while talking on their cell phones, taking a drink of water, sending a text message, or changing a CD. The point: Even minor distractions make it hard to handle routine driving challenges. As Lisi emerged, she looked at me somewhat sheepishly. She later told me she had never realized just what a dangerous habit many of her friends had, answering their cell phones when driving. (I can only hope she really did mean her friends, and not herself.)

On another course, the kids are asked to drive down a single lane at about 35 miles per hour. The lane splits into three, each with a green light at the end. Suddenly, two of the lights turn red, at which point drivers must shift into the lane with the green light. I saw Lisi's car come to a squealing stop as she hit her brakes as hard as possible, an exercise meant to familiarize students with a car's antilock-braking system. It proves that hitting the brakes hard won't damage the car, a fact that surprised my own kid: "I always figured I'd pretty much break my car if I slammed on the brakes. Now I know that cars are actually designed to stop quickly if you have to," Lisi said.

Then the students repeat the course, now at 40 miles per hour, to show how even a measly five-mile-per-hour increase can make a huge →

## The 4 Key Risks

It's the statistic every parent hates to hear: Motor vehicle crashes are the leading killer of teens in the U.S., causing one in three deaths. Here, how to protect your child



- **THE RISK: NIGHT DRIVING** For 16-year-olds, the odds of a fatal collision triple between 9 P.M. and 6 A.M., reports a study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Part of this is due to poor visibility, plus driving drowsy quadruples the crash risk. This is also when alcohol is most likely to enter the mix—one-third of all fatally injured drivers are alcohol-impaired, according to research.

**REDUCE IT** Establish a driving curfew of 9 P.M., and reiterate the dangers of drinking. Draw up a driving contract to formalize the rules.
- **THE RISK: DISTRACTIONS** Nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involve driver inattention within three seconds of the accident, according to a study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. Dialing a cell phone, for instance, triples the risk of a crash. While distractions are dangerous for drivers of all ages, teens are especially vulnerable, since according to MRI scans, the parts of the brain responsible for multitasking don't fully develop until age 25, says Jay Giedd, M.D., chief of brain imaging in child psychiatry at the National Institute of Mental Health.

**REDUCE IT** Insist that teens turn off cell phones and select a CD before the car starts moving, and that they abstain from any activity—eating, drinking, makeup application—that takes their hands off the wheel or their eyes off the road.
- **THE RISK: PASSENGERS** For 16- and 17-year-olds, carrying just one passenger increases their risk of dying in a crash by almost 50 percent; having three or more riders triples the risk as compared with driving alone (due to the distraction involved, peers egging on the driver to speed up, etc.).

**REDUCE IT** Don't allow your child to chauffeur pals—or specify a one-passenger limit (including siblings).
- **THE RISK: LACK OF ROAD EXPERIENCE** The most dangerous time for teens is the first 1,500 solo miles—that's just how long it takes for kids to begin to learn how to handle the roads, says Anne McCartt, Ph.D., senior vice president of research at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The leading cause of teen accidents is plain old driver error, such as overcorrecting on a turn or failing to yield, according to the Allstate Foundation.

**REDUCE IT** Install limits during those first 1,500 miles: Have your child follow your state's Graduated Driver Licensing, or GDL, laws ([ihs.org/laws/graduatedlicenseintro.aspx](http://ihs.org/laws/graduatedlicenseintro.aspx)), which impose driving curfews and passenger restrictions for a period of time. And insist that she buckle up: Fifty-six percent of teens killed in crashes weren't wearing seat belts. —Judy Dutton