

New Jersey Parent/Teen Safe Driving Orientation

The New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety has teamed with Kean University to develop an evidence-based, data-driven safe driving orientation for parents and teens. The orientation is the first program to bring parents and teens together as a joint audience with the goal of empowering them with information, resources and tools to cultivate safe driving attitudes and behavior.

The Orientation

Motor vehicle crashes remain the number one cause of death for teens. GDL laws are recognized as the single most effective tool in reducing the number of teen driver crashes, and the resulting injuries and fatalities. Although New Jersey's GDL law is considered one of the most progressive and stringent in the United States (Williams et al., 2010), ensuring that parents and teens fully understand the risks and responsibilities associated with driving is equally essential in preventing these tragedies. The orientation is designed to increase parental involvement and understanding of the GDL and strengthen communication between parents and teens through clear rules and expectations to create a teen driver experience based on safety.

The orientation is approximately 60-75 minutes in length and designed for parents and their teens in the pre-permit or permit state of licensure (parents and their teens already holding a probationary license will also benefit). The orientation is presented by trained instructors in community-based settings (i.e. schools, libraries) and can be linked to classroom driver education programs and back-to-school nights.

Evidence Based/Research Driven

The orientation is based on research examining the influence of parental involvement on the impact of teen driver safety. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and State Farm in their report entitled *Driving Through the Eyes of Teens, A Closer Look*, revealed that teens with authoritative parents (parents that set clear rules and monitor their teen's driving activities in a helpful and supportive way) are half as likely to crash, 71 percent less likely to drive intoxicated, and 30 percent less likely to use a cell phone while driving than their counterparts with uninvolved parents. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention and other researchers (Simons-Morton., 2007) also point to parental influence directly impacting teen driving behaviors.

The authoritative parenting style, long known by researchers as having a strong influence on the likelihood of teens avoiding or taking part in risky behaviors such as smoking or drinking, is also recognized as having the greatest impact on teen driver safety. The orientation compels parents to utilize this style when guiding their teen through the GDL experience by presenting its impact on teen driver safety and equipping parents with the appropriate tools and resources through interactive exercises based on *Accelerated Learning*. This experience-based learning approach allows participants to apply the new behavior and gain confidence in their ability to implement the presented techniques after the orientation. Through interactive role play, parents and teens develop driving contracts, and exercise enforcement and compliance of lifesaving GDL restrictions. In order to minimize resistance of the new parenting style being presented, the facilitator remains neutral and non-judgmental, respecting the knowledge and experience of their audience.

Taken from *Applying Best-Practices in Behavioral Intervention to Promoting Road Safety*, the methodology used to create the orientation is a systematic approach to the development of theoretically-grounded behavioral change intervention. The six-step model emphasizes the importance of setting minimal behavioral objectives to maximize success along with the evaluation and refinement of interventions based on findings.

The six-steps are:

- 1) Set a long-term vision.
- 2) Identify behavioral objectives linked to the key health outcome.
- 3) Identify the target constructs that influence the adoption of the behavioral objectives.
- 4) Design and develop intervention content to address constructs.
- 5) Evaluate effectiveness of interventions.
- 6) Refine interventions and behavior change model, when needed.

The orientation follows this model using data to set behavioral objectives, create interventions and evaluate and refine the interventions used. Kean University is currently conducting a sixteen month research study (5/11-9/12) that will evaluate the efficacy of the orientation.

The *Theory of Planned Behavior* was used to identify and develop the learning progression needed to affect behavioral change and evaluation. The model for effectual behavioral change was established as a conventional approach to explaining the relationship between attitudes and behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and supports participants' intentions and behavior as a function of three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Armitage & Conner (2001) validated this approach to behavioral change by reviewing 185 studies and found that the theory of planned behavior accounted for thirty-nine percent of variance in intentions and twenty-seven percent of variance in behavior.

During a six-month pilot study conducted by Kean University, pre and post surveys were used to measure the presentation and resources. Preliminary surveys revealed that parents felt overly confident in their teens driving ability, 60 percent of parents surveyed described their teens as having excellent driving skills and 61 percent of those same parents reported attitudes about their teens driving that suggested a permissive (52%) or uninvolved (9%) parenting style.

In the post-survey conducted following the orientation 81 percent of the parents felt compelled to increase the number of practice driving hours for their teen, 76 percent felt more inclined to enforce the GDL and 72 percent felt persuaded to control the keys based on the information presented. Between 76 – 86 percent of the parents reported believed the tool kit provided resources that would support their understanding of the GDL, practice driving, enforcing the GDL restrictions at home and controlling the keys to the vehicle driven by their teen.

Available Resources

Facilitator training workshops include a comprehensive review of relevant research materials used to construct the orientation and New Jersey's GDL law. After a brief introduction to the research and discussion of parenting styles and interactive learning, facilitators are guided through the programs accelerated learning approach and provided with opportunities to employ it while practicing the numerous parent/teen exercises within the orientation. Certificates of completion are issued to those who have successfully completed the training.