

Teens, I'd like to offer you some advice that may be the most important lesson you'll ever learn about driving—although it may have only been covered briefly in a single lesson of your driver's education course. Texting while driving is a serious distraction and one that could cost you your life or the lives of others. I know how hard it is to put the phone down and concentrate on the road. Even as an adult, I sometimes struggle with avoiding distractions while I'm driving. But there are plenty of other options and a lot of good reasons to keep your eyes on the road.

I know you may think that it only takes a second to type that text and hit send. However, in actuality, the average text takes your eyes away from the road for five seconds. If you're going 55 mph, then five seconds is the amount of time it takes you to drive the length of a football field. A better alternative is to wait until you reach your destination. Or, if you absolutely must respond to a text sooner, find a safe place to pull over.

You may also think that you're a good enough driver that you can safely send a text message without interfering with your ability to operate your vehicle. Statistics show that teen drivers who text spend approximately 10% of their driving time driving outside of their lane. But it's hard to know that if you aren't looking. If having the phone within reach is too much of a temptation for you, try placing it in the backseat where you can't get to it while you're driving.

You may have even seen your parents or other adults texting while driving themselves. Let me assure you that doesn't make it any more safe. In fact, because texting takes your eyes off the road longer than any other activity that distracts you from driving, it makes all drivers 23 times more likely to be involved in an accident. In 2011, almost a fourth of all auto collisions were caused by someone using a cell phone. So, in this case it's best to do as your parents say and not as they do.

Another good reason to avoid texting and driving is because it is outlawed in many cities and states. Getting caught could get you in big trouble. And in addition to the actual laws in place, there are technological advances that now allow parents to install driver cams that show them in real time exactly what you're doing while you're driving. This could get you in even bigger trouble.

So, teens, as you prepare to get out on the roads, let your biggest worry be whether you'll pass your driving test, not whether you'll end up in an accident due to texting and driving. Let it wait. Pull over. Or just put your phone out of reach until you get where you're going. When you respond to your BFF's text of "where r u?", you don't want your answer to be "in an ambulance."