

Novice Drivers with Disabilities – General Considerations Before Driving

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Teaching a new driver can be a stressful time for any parent or guardian. New drivers with cognitive or physical disabilities can add extra challenges to the process. Here are a few tips to help gauge readiness and to know when

to partner with a driver rehabilitation specialist.

Consider your teenager’s readiness

- Can your teen independently shop and pay for items in a store?
- Does your teen manage school and homework well?
- Does your teen always take their medication as prescribed?
- Can your teen problem-solve when things go wrong or off schedule?
- Can your teen manage their own emotions and accept instruction and feedback?
- Have you and your teen reviewed your state’s driving manual together?
- Did your teen complete the classroom portion of driver’s education?



Consider your teenager’s functional skills*

1. Is your teen able to enter and exit the driver’s seat of a parked vehicle independently?
2. Is your teen able to independently load and properly stow their mobility device into the vehicle?
3. While seated in a parked car:
 - a. Does your teen have trouble reaching or using the pedals or steering wheel?
 - b. Is your teen able to reach and use the secondary controls?
4. As a passenger:
 - a. Does your teen have trouble sitting up while riding in a moving vehicle?
 - b. Does your teen see and identify important information while you are driving?
 - c. Does your teen focus on detail and have trouble getting the “gist” of the situation?
 - d. Can your teen prioritize competing sights and sounds?
 - e. Does your teen readily watch for and anticipate other drivers, pedestrians, etc.?
 - f. Does your teen seem easily distracted?
 - g. Does your teen quickly see and identify red lights or stopped traffic c?
 - h. Is your teen able to navigate to familiar locations?

*Keep in mind, these questions reflect issues that may make the task of driving more challenging.

continued

Making an informed decision on your teenager's readiness to drive is highly individualized and should not be rushed.

If you feel your teen is ready to begin training, the points below will help you determine if they need the services of a specialist versus participating in a traditional driver's education program. Typically, if your teen needs equipment to operate the gas/brake/steering wheel, they may need a specialist. Here are a couple additional things to consider:

- Does your local driver's education instructor have experience instructing drivers with your teen's specific diagnosis?
- Has your local driver's education instructor or licensing agency passed your teen, but they still appear to be unsafe driving a vehicle?

If you feel that specialized services are in order, your local driver rehabilitation specialist can complete a driving readiness evaluation and help with the following:

1. If you are uncertain of your teen's readiness.
2. Your teen needs assistance, vehicle modification, or equipment to enter and/or load a mobility device.
3. Your teen has trouble turning their head from side to side.
4. Your teen has trouble reaching or moving their feet between the pedals.
5. You notice your teen looking at his or her feet to use the pedals.
6. Your teen has trouble turning the steering wheel.
7. It is hard for your teen to operate and use turn signals or wipers.
8. Multitasking or prioritizing information is hard for your teen.
9. As a passenger, your teen seems to miss information or have difficulty understanding when it is safe to turn or change lanes.
10. Your teen is having trouble making progress with traditional driver's education.

General tips for driving success:

- A teenager living with a medical condition is encouraged to seek medical clearance from their doctor prior to beginning driver's education.
- Prior to driver's education, engage your teen as an active passenger in the car, from the front seat; navigating to familiar locations, calling out hazards or traffic light changes.
- Use a pre-driving checklist including things like medications, emotional state checks, navigation plan.
- Allow for extra time in all aspects of driver training – studying the rules, time behind the wheel.
- Break down driving tasks into small steps – tailor learning to your teen's ability.
- Give frequent breaks and remain calm.
- Teach your teen emergency roadside skills and how to respond if pulled over.
- If available in your area, driving simulators provide a great opportunity for teens to practice driving related skills in a low risk setting.