

Distracted driving is anything that captures the attention of the driver behind the wheel. By becoming distracted, he or she may overlook hazardous situations or lose control of the vehicle. This could lead to potentially deadly accidents. Distracted drivers put themselves, and those around them on the road, at risk. When a driver takes their eyes off the road, even for a brief moment, they lose their focus. Being distracted by cell phone usage is the most common type of distraction and leads to drivers not being aware of potential hazards because they are not focused on the road. Because many states ban handheld phones but allow hands-free devices, it gives drivers a false sense of security when using their cell phones hands-free. Other distractions include the driver taking their hands off the wheel for any reason and endangering the driver, passengers, and anyone else on the road. Examples include eating, drinking, or smoking while driving. The motorist's reaction time and control of the vehicle is compromised if both hands are not on the wheel. Daydreaming, talking to a passenger, being preoccupied, or listening to an audio book are all examples of distractions as well. Many drivers believe they are doing everything appropriately; their eyes are on the road and hands are on the wheel. However, if something else has captured the driver's attention, then they are not adequately focused on driving and not fully aware of the dangers of being on the road. Teen drivers are the most likely to be distracted while driving.

To reduce or eliminate cell phone distraction, the driver should operate the GPS before leaving for their destination. If the GPS needs to be adjusted, the driver should pull over to adjust it or have a passenger make necessary changes. If GPS is not needed, the cell phone should be put away while driving to avoid temptation. If possible, the driver should download an application that will silence calls or texts while driving. This will eliminate the impulse to check the phone. New drivers should be educated on the dangers of using their cell phones while driving. Parents need to pay attention to their teens' behaviors and take away cell phones if it seems obvious they may be distracted while driving. Drivers should always eat or drink before driving. If they pull off to get take-out food or drinks, they need to wait until they have safely reached their destination to eat or drink. Avoid any distractions that will cause the driver to take their hands off the wheel. Don't reach in the back seat, change the radio station, or dig through your purse for anything. If it is urgent, pull over to take care of the matter. Some distractions are more challenging to avoid. A lack

of sleep, emotional stress, or having an intense discussion with someone can all result in an accident. This is especially important for new drivers who have not developed strong driving skills. Try to avoid powerful conversations with passengers and make every effort to ignore anything that causes distractions. If at all possible, try to avoid driving when upset or sleep deprived. When someone is driving, the most important task is staying focused on their driving. Parents have a critical role in guiding their teens and reinforcing the dangers of distracted driving.

While statistics show underage drinking in the United States has dropped drastically since 1991, there are still overwhelming statistics regarding the number of driving fatalities resulting from teen drinking and driving. Teens that do consume alcohol are much more likely to binge drink and then get behind the wheel. They are less experienced drivers than adult drivers and this increases the likelihood they will be in a fatal accident. Parental involvement is essential to help protect the lives of teen drivers and to avoid underage drinking altogether. Teens need guidance from adult role models. This will hopefully start at home with their parents.

My mom has shared many stories from her childhood. Her group of friends regularly drank alcohol while in high school. None of them received appropriate parental supervision and the consequences from drinking alcohol was not discussed. Luckily, none of them were in car accidents while intoxicated but many of their classmates were. Despite avoiding serious impacts when she was younger, my mom was not aware that alcoholism ran in her family. She continued to drink after high school and by the time she realized she was alcoholic, the addiction had taken over and was becoming progressively worse. Under the influence, she fell three stories from a deck and shattered her spine. She survived with considerable chronic pain which magnified her desire to drink. Finally, twenty-seven years after trying her first drink, my mom found sobriety. Since I was old enough to understand, my mom has been educating me on the effects of alcohol. She has also been very vocal about how alcoholism is genetic and I could possibly be alcoholic. Both of my parents and grandmothers are alcoholic. I have no intention of ever trying alcohol. If a teen tries it in high school, by the time he or she realizes they are alcoholic, it may be too late for them to control their drinking and often many people continue drinking even when it causes significant problems. The pattern of drinking in alcoholics becomes progressively worse. I

know this from hearing my mom's stories. Her drinking in high school seemed innocent enough. She and her friends believed they were invincible, nothing bad would happen, and they rationalized their drinking was not harmful. If my mom received guidance from her parents about the effects of alcohol and the alcoholism present in the family, her path in life may have been very different. I am very content with my life and emphatically believe alcohol would not enhance it. I hope any teen that considers trying alcohol asks him or herself, what value will it have to their life?