

The Defense Driving Skills Checklist

This checklist is a series of safe driving habits that you can practice and learn with your teen that will help them develop safe driving skills, and help maintain safety on the road in spite of the conditions around you and the actions of others. This checklist is not a guarantee that they will not have accidents, but if each point on this checklist is mastered, it will help to reduce the risk of potential accidents.

This checklist is split into three sections. I have found it best to fully learn and master skills listed in one section prior to moving to the next, more advanced section.

Beginning Driving Skills

This list is intended to help new drivers who are just driving for the first time or are not prepared enough to drive on the road in traffic yet. Here are some of the suggested beginning skills:

- Pre-vehicle inspection: this includes doing a walk-around of the vehicle, making sure areas are clear from debris, hazards, and small children.
- Reading dashboard gauges: noticing gas levels, how to read the speedometer, and knowing if any warning lights are on.
- Review of all buttons and levers: Know where everything is located, such as turn signals, windshield wipers, headlights, hazard lights, etc.
- Properly adjusting and using mirrors
- Accurate, smooth maneuvering of the vehicle
- Smooth turns done at an appropriate speed
- Backing Up
- Proper driver posture and positioning: hand position, foot position, etc
- Controlled, smooth stopping
- Parking in a marked stall
- Turning off the car

Intermediate Driving Skills

Once the beginning skills are mastered and the driver is comfortable with the basics of a vehicle, it is time to move that experience onto the road. Note the level of traffic and don't attempt driving while there are too many cars out. Ensure that visibility is good with clear weather and good lighting. It is also important to make sure there is a good level of mastery for driving laws and knowing what signs mean. Here are the intermediate driving skills to work on:

- Yielding to right-of-way vehicles and pedestrians
- Keeping a safe, 2-second minimum following distance between cars
- Anticipating hazards and actions of other drivers
- Communicating with other drivers
- Acknowledging and stating the meaning of road signs
- Obeying speed limits
- Using turn signals appropriately
- Parking the vehicle on a curb
- Parking the vehicle at an incline
- Parking at an angle
- Entering and exiting roundabouts correctly
- Entering and exiting intersections correctly, following traffic signals if applicable
- Using passing techniques properly and in a controlled manner
- Keeping attention on the road

Advanced Skills

Once the beginning and intermediate skills are mastered, it is time to move onto the advanced skills. Each section should build on the other and the new driver should have a good level of comfort executing the prior skills. Here are the skills to work on with your advanced student driver:

- Driving calmly and correctly in rush hour traffic
- Adjusting driving during bad weather and bad or low lighting
- Driving on expressways with proper entering and exiting
- Cautious driving around semi-trucks
- Using caution around motorcycles and bicycles
- Handling complex driving situations
- Handling multiple driving hazards
- Using proper defensive driving techniques
- Looking ahead and planning for escape routes
- A solid knowledge of emergency procedures

Important note: Nothing in this checklist is designed to replace or substitute driving lessons required by law, nor was it designed to substitute driving rule and regulation booklets offered by your local DMV. This checklist is simply a list of skills that every driver should know and master to help improve safe driving.