

Conversation Starters

Several focus groups with parents of preteens and preteens themselves were conducted for Safe Kids Worldwide in January 2008. Some of the quotes from parents and preteens are included below. These quotes can be used as conversation starters when speaking to parents about the risks to preteens in cars.

Parents of preteens were asked about 11-12 year-olds riding in the front seat:

“My kids always complained and felt that the front seat was a more privileged place to sit. But my kids knew the airbag issue so they also knew that until they were a certain size and weight they shouldn’t sit in that front seat. I don’t recall ever having a big discussion about it so I’m assuming they read the tag.”

– Father, St. Louis

Discussion with Parents:

1. What rules do you have about the front seat?
2. How do your preteens react to those? (Goal is to get parents to discuss what they do, hopefully show how setting and *enforcing* rules is key.)
3. Have you talked about the airbag warning label with your kids?

Some parents said that they did not want to begin teaching their children how to drive yet, stating that there are other issues at this age that are more important.

Discussion with Parents:

1. Let’s discuss at what age you should begin talking with your children about driving. (Many preteens are already doing this – and have been since they were young.)
2. Reminder that though they may feel overwhelmed by all the new things happening with preteens (puberty, relationships, etc.), car crashes are the leading cause of death to their age group – and keeping them buckled up in a back seat are the two most important steps they can take to protect them.

“There are so many other things to talk about at this age – they’re growing so fast.”

--Mother, Tallahassee

Parents reported that their children complain about certain drivers. They thought their children were exaggerating until they drove in the car with that person themselves. One mother said she didn't believe her child's complaints about the bus driver falling asleep until she saw him herself. Regardless, parents still allow their preteens to ride with these drivers.

“My son will be the first to say that his aunt is the worst driver in America because she doesn't pay attention...his response is immediate when I tell him his aunt is picking him up from school.”

--Mother, Tallahassee

Preteens said they speak up when feeling unsafe with other drivers. However, they do not feel as comfortable doing so as they do with their parents fearing making them angry or being called a back seat driver. Preteens reported that other drivers, such as an uncle, sometimes taunt them when they commented on their driving by slamming on their breaks or pulling out of the driveway before they have their seatbelts on.

“One time I felt kind of embarrassed because my aunt was drinking before we went to go somewhere and she wasn't wearing her seatbelt and I told her 'click it or ticket' and she said 'I don't wear seatbelts' and so I felt kind of embarrassed.

--Female tween, St. Louis

When asked about riding with unsafe drivers, it can be a struggle for preteens to handle:

“It's not my place to say something.”

--Male preteen, St. Louis

Reply: “It is your place because you want to be safe.”

--Female preteen, St. Louis

Discussion with Parents:

1. Have you talked with your kids about what they should do if they feel unsafe in a car with another driver?
2. Discuss how to set ground rules for safe carpooling.
3. One of the most important things you can do is to let your child know its OK to tell you if they feel unsafe riding with another driver. You then have to do something about it!

When asked about other drivers, one female participant said she often felt unsafe when riding with her friend's older sister because she was often multitasking in the car.

“She'll be on her cell phone, driving fast with the music loud.”

--Female preteen, Tallahassee