

Parents have critical role in driver training

By staff and wire reports

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

A leading proponent of teen driving safety says parents are the missing link to improving new driver safety and they need to understand that they are largely alone when it comes to teaching their children to drive. Corinne Fortenbacher, president of RookieDriver.Net, says 32 states have little or no drivers' education requirements and that places most of the responsibility on the parent.

Government statistics show that more than 1 million teens are involved in auto crashes every year.

Most states have implemented longer graduated drivers license programs that allow more time for parents to drive with their children during the learner's permit phase. Supervised parent involvement with extended learning time proves to reduce exposure to high-risk situations, according to safety experts.

One of the most overlooked components in improving safety, says Fortenbacher, is simply identifying their car with a standardized "New Driver" magnet that alerts other drivers that a novice driver is behind the wheel. "This allows experienced drivers to anticipate common new driver mistakes," she adds.

RookieDriver.Net's products are designed by teens, and are available through the Web site.

Kids.gov Web site helps cut through research clutter

Kids.gov, a Web site created by the U.S. government, steers kids to helpful sites on the Internet when they need online research on school subjects. Most of the sites linked to from Kids.gov are government agencies.

"We want (kids) to know that as they grow up they can use government information that is fun and useful in their everyday lives," said Martha Dorris, an official with the General Services Administration, which provides space and services for federal agencies and, sometimes, the public.

Information on Kids.gov is prescreened for content and divided into three categories: for kids in kindergarten through grade 5, for grades 6 to 9, and for teachers. Material doesn't slant toward a particular view.

A big plus for kids is that you can search by topic in addition to searching for one word or phrase. For example, if you Google "solar system," you get more than 35 million links. If you search for it by topic on Kids.gov, there are 21 links to sites including NASA's.

Many of the sites also have games. Yes, they are educational games, but you might have some fun, and you won't be lying to parents when you tell them you

are working on that solar-system project.

Web site helps parents identify learning disabilities

Schwab Learning, a nonprofit program of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation dedicated to helping families of children with learning and attention problems, launched an interactive tool for parents who suspect their child might have a learning problem.

"When Your Child Struggles with Learning: A Step-by-Step Guide for Getting Help," takes parents on a virtual journey through the complex process of getting the help they need to determine if a learning disability is present, covering topics from considering why a child might be struggling in school, through the formal evaluation for learning disabilities, to tips for how to advocate on a child's behalf.

Previous studies show that parents and pediatricians overwhelmingly adopt a "wait and see" approach when they suspect a possible learning problem in their child. Because many parents find the LD-identification process to be confusing and intimidating, the new tool is designed to make it easier for parents to address their child's problems earlier by providing them with a single valuable resource that they can turn to as soon as they suspect a learning problem.

"Our goal is to help children achieve despite the obstacles," said Jodell Seagrave, managing director of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation. "Early intervention and ongoing support for children with learning disabilities is critical for success in school and life. Our interactive guide enables parents to easily find useful ways to facilitate their child's success."

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