

# AAA Drive Talk Program

The AAA Drive Talk Program is a three-part instructional process designed to help parents teach their children to drive. It is based on a traditional learning technique called “commentary driving” in which the student verbally reports each element of his or her driving activities as it occurs. For example, when making a turn the student might say, “release accelerator, apply brake, turn on signal, check mirrors and blind spot, and steer through corner.” Commentary driving enables instructors to assess students’ perceptions of the driving experience and examine their thought processes as they encounter various driving situations.

The AAA Drive Talk Program puts a new twist on commentary driving by adding two preliminary steps. These steps help your teen identify important driving skills before they ever get behind the wheel and they make you, the parent, an active participant in the learning process. In the first step, the parent models commentary driving so the student can better understand both the process and the many different behaviors that contribute to safe driving. In the second step, the student provides commentary on the parent’s driving, which further builds awareness of the many skills and activities involved. Finally, in the third step, the teen takes the wheel and provides commentary on their own driving.

The AAA Drive Talk program is simple and easy to implement, and it is a great way to evaluate teens driving competency both before and after they get their license. As a parent, you will gain insight into your teen’s perceptual abilities and get a better idea of just how prepared he or she is to drive. And in the process, you might find yourself becoming a better driver as well!

## Drive Talk Step 1

Parents, be a model driver! As you and your teen are driving, provide commentary on your actions when you encounter something that requires a change in your speed or direction. By describing what you’re doing as you’re doing it, your teen will gain insight into your thought process and how you evaluate the driving environment.

**Example:** You and your teen are driving to the mall. You are traveling down a two-lane roadway with traffic going the same direction. You are in the left lane. You are approaching a traffic signal that is currently green, but is about to turn yellow and you want to turn left at the light into the mall parking lot. There is a car in the lane next to you that suddenly cuts into your lane. Describe to your teen how you slowed down due to the sudden lane change of the car ahead, how you turned on your signal, how you prepared for the stop at the light ahead and ultimately how you made your turn into the mall.

Things to describe to your teen:

- Using the mirrors
- Using the turn signal
- Adjusting speed
- Scanning the environment
- Maintaining a safe following distance (if applicable)
- Braking smoothly
- Coming to a full stop
- Successfully turning into lane
- Accelerating to appropriate speed

At this step, your teen will be an active listener so it’s important to have a discussion before and after the drive and answer any questions your teen may have. It’s a good idea to go over the things you may describe before the drive so your teen knows why they are important to safe driving. Once the drive is complete, talk about them again as this will reinforce their importance.

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## Drive Talk Step 2

During this step, your teen is still the passenger but have your teen to provide you commentary as you drive. This way, you can get an idea of how your teen is processing the driving environment and how they would deal with changes in speed or direction. This is a way to assess your teen's abilities before they ever get behind the wheel and allows you to give feedback on your teens thought process.

**Example:** You are approaching a four-way stop with stop signs and you want to turn right. Have your teen describe your actions and the environment as you approach the stop sign, signal for right turn, reduce speed, gradually stop, wait your turn, make your turn and accelerate.

Things your teen should mention:

- Using the mirrors
- Using the turn signal
- Adjusting speed
- Scanning the environment
- Maintaining a safe following distance (if applicable)
- Braking smoothly
- Coming to a full stop
- Successfully turning into lane
- Accelerating to appropriate speed

After the drive, have a discussion about the experience and answer any questions your teen may have and be sure to ask your teen questions too! Perhaps facilitate conversation by asking "what if" scenarios and listen to how your teen responds and provide feedback.

## Drive Talk Step 3

This step is intended for teens with permits and who are practicing driving. At this step, have your teen participate in commentary driving. It's a great way to assess how your teen is processing driving abilities and evaluating the driving environment. Ask your teen to verbally describe what they are seeing and what they are doing whenever they encounter something that requires a change in speed or direction. For this exercise, it's best to choose a road with low traffic until your teen gets more comfortable describing actions while driving.

**Example:** You are approaching an intersection with a traffic signal that is yellow. Ask your teen in advance to turn right at the light. Then have your teen describe their approach to the signal and describe their actions as they make the right turn.

Things to look for as a parent:

- Using the mirrors
- Using the turn signal
- Adjusting speed
- Scanning the environment
- Maintaining a safe following distance (if applicable)
- Braking smoothly
- Coming to a full stop
- Successfully turning into lane
- Accelerating to appropriate speed

At this step, you will be able evaluate your teen and compare their perceptual abilities to those they displayed in step 2. Continue this step for as long as necessary because it's important for both you and your teen to feel comfortable in their ability to perceive the roadway.