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YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY

It is well known that drivers are at greater risk in their early years of driving. During the first year of solo driving, the risk of crashing is three times greater than that for other more experienced drivers.

RACV believes it is important that any road safety initiatives implemented are effective, and measures known to be unsuccessful should be avoided.

There is understandable community concern about young drivers, and parents, schools, and community groups often approach RACV for advice. Outlined here is some information to help understand what works and what doesn't in terms of young drivers.

What works?

- Supervised on-road driving experience. Research clearly shows that supervised driving experience prior to licensing is highly effective. Learner drivers who receive 120 hours or more of supervised experience have up to 35% fewer crashes when licensed, than those with less experience. Pre-licence driving experience should cover a range of conditions including day and night, city and country, wet and dry, etc.
- Cooperation between driving instructors and parents, or supervisors. While parents and others may be effective on-road

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What works?

driving supervisors, the quality of instruction can be improved by engaging an authorised driving instructor, who can help both the learner and the supervisor.

- Improved hazard perception. Young or inexperienced drivers are not very good at predicting or recognising potentially dangerous or hazardous situations on the road. Development of skills, such as hazard perception, can only be gained through extensive experience.

- Graduated licensing system. A graduated licensing system, under which drivers must demonstrate more skills as they pass from L-plates to P-plates to a full licence, is an effective road safety measure.

- Enforcement. Police enforcement is effective when the novice driver understands that they will get caught and perhaps lose their licence if they break the law. Enforcement should focus on unsafe behaviours, such as speeding, drink driving, and red light running.

What doesn't work?

- Off-road driver training for learners. Off-road training programs (at a track or circuit), where scientifically evaluated, have not led to subsequent reductions in casualty crashes among participants. In fact, some courses may raise drivers' levels of confidence, and also encourage earlier licensing which may also lead to an increase in casualty crashes. These facilities are also very costly to build and maintain and may divert funds away from

effective road safety initiatives.

■ Advanced training for licensed drivers. Courses which focus on developing skills required for rare events, such as skidding or emergency braking, may in some instances increase subsequent crash involvement. They may increase the young drivers' confidence, and skills imparted are largely forgotten because they are seldom applied.

■ Specific short courses for learners. Research shows that specific programs for learners that focus on road law knowledge and driving techniques do not lead to a reduction in crashes or traffic violations.

■ Insufficient experience. Young inexperienced drivers need extensive on-road driving experience in a real-world driving environment.

What can you do?

Research indicates that young drivers are over represented in crashes because of a lack of experience, poor hazard perception, and a tendency to take risks.

Parents/supervisors

■ Ensure you give your learner as much supervised driving practice as possible, preferably 120 hours or more in a range of conditions.

■ Talk to your learner's driving instructor, and maybe go on a lesson or two so that you know what the driving instructor is teaching. Some driving schools, including the RACV DriveSchool, offer learners a free lesson if parents attend.

■ Encourage your learner to use some of the excellent resources available, including booklets like the "Road to Solo Driving"; "Getting there: From L's to P's"; or the TAC's "Drive Smart" CD-Rom; www.drivesmart.vic.gov.au.

■ Be a good role model. From a very young age children learn driving attitudes, beliefs and behaviours by observing adults.

What can you do?

Schools

- Include road safety as part of the school curriculum.
- Ensure your school has an up-to-date road safety education policy.
- Get parents involved. Talk to your local VicRoads office about holding a free “Keys Please” session at your school for students and parents.
- Utilise road safety programs and resources from VicRoads, TAC, Victoria Police and RACV. These programs, designed to fit within the school curriculum, include:
 - RACV “Transmission” program (for Year 9 to 12 media, English, psychology, etc)
 - TAC Muck-up Day video (for VCE Legal Studies)
 - TAC “Raw in the Classroom” (for Year 7-10 English and Health Education)

Community groups

- Develop programs that will help learners to get more supervised experience. Target those young people in your community who don't have adult drivers to supervise them.

Contact numbers

- For information about RACV's Driver Training Research Report or education programs call: 9790 2924
- Other helpful contacts:
 - VicRoads - 13 11 71
 - TAC - 9664 6106
 - RACV DriveSchool - 1300 788 229