

Mercedes-Benz Driving Academy for New Drivers

Supervised Driving Practice – Part 2

First, some theory...

To a large degree, your personality determines the way you drive. Certain personality types are more likely to exhibit aggressive driving tendencies, others may be less confident, more careful or many things in between. If we must accept that a driver's personality can't be changed within the scope of driver training, at least we should recognize an individual's personality traits and consider what effect they have on their decision making. Our GLP course includes a Personal Risk Assessment session where the results of the assessment are discussed to help students understand how their individual personality type may influence their driving (decision making) and what to be on the lookout for. Parents know their new drivers as well as anyone and have a good sense of their personality traits.

Why Drivers Crash

Drivers don't crash because they don't know how to control the car, or don't understand the rules of the road. Most often, it is because they made poor decisions that lead to a crash. Impulsivity plays a major role here and the teen brain is highly susceptible to impulsivity and remains so until they reach their mid-twenties on average. Impulsivity can be defined as "acting without adequate consideration of the consequences". Impulsivity is a part of a person's personality and while we can't necessarily change that, we can make them aware of the role of impulsivity in their driving and how that can lead to bad decisions, and potentially crashes and violations. This topic is a major focus in our GLP classroom training that parent co-drivers should be aware of. Impulsivity can influence a lot of things – deciding to take a certain route, drive in challenging weather conditions, bringing friends along in the car, driving while tired or impaired, speeding, passing, left turns – the list is long.

Breaking down the goals for driver education:

We break driver training down into these categories – from basic to most complex:

- 1) Vehicle Control – the fundamental skills needed to drive a vehicle. Braking, accelerating, steering, etc.
- 2) Traffic Interaction – rules of the road, right of way, signs, lane markings etc.
- 3) New Driver Risk Factors – driving with friends, driving in poor weather, unfamiliar roads/areas, distractions, impairment, tiredness, etc.
- 4) Personality and Lifestyle – who you are is how you drive – risk tolerance, impulsivity

Effective driver training takes all these factors into account and incorporates them into the supervised practice

“Defensive Driving”

When I learned to drive, “Defensive Driving” was a relatively new term that was used to describe a style of observation and anticipation intended to alert drivers of developing hazards that could be avoided to prevent crashes. For years, “Defensive Driving” courses were offered as enhancements to regular driving school. Those with poor driving records were sometimes sent to “Defensive Driving School” in an attempt to make them better drivers. One of the earliest (and still used) methods was the Smith System,

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developed in 1952. The key points are still relevant today, even though so much about our roads and vehicles have changed. ICBC refers to “See, Think, Do” which is a variation on the same theme. At Mercedes-Benz Driving Academy, we don’t have a “Defensive Driving Course”. Why would that be? The answer is this: There is no way to teach safe driving without fully embracing all defensive driving elements in every aspect of driving. In other words, everything we teach drivers is built around observation, decision making and execution of safe maneuvers. Defensive driving does not stand alone - there really is no other way to drive safely.

The Importance of Proper Vision Skills

Driving is all about using vision properly. A driver with well developed vision skills is a good driver. It is a worthy objective for all drivers – to understand the role of vision in different scenarios and use the various vision skills properly in all conditions to make driving safer and less stressful. There are several categories of vision related to driving. High-aim vision refers to looking far enough ahead to see things as they develop in time to react if necessary. Practicing high-aim vision enables the use of peripheral vision, which helps drivers to see movement and changes in a wide field of view. Scanning vision keeps our eyes moving, locates key markers when turning and helps us stay safe crossing intersections. Emergency vision is the skill to be able to look at a “solution” – where we want to go – rather than a “problem” – the thing we want to avoid. Many common mistakes for new drivers are rooted in undeveloped vision skills, and as supervisors and co-drivers we need to be aware of this so we can make corrections. For example, fixating on things, looking too close in front of the car, and looking in the wrong place at the wrong time all lead to identifiable problems like driving too close to parked cars, erratic or excessive steering, turning wide or too close, to name a few. It should be one of the first questions a co-driver asks themselves when trying to diagnose a problem their new driver is struggling with – what are they doing with their vision? Here’s an interesting observation: New drivers who have played sports, skied or snowboarded, cyclists, go-karts, dirt bikes – often have a head start on the vision skills needed for driving and adapt quite quickly.

Driving to Expectations

As a co-driver, here’s something to be aware of: For the most part, and to the best of their ability, your learner driver will drive to *your expectations* while you are in the car with them. This means they will tend to listen, follow the rules, pay attention and generally be on their best behaviour in your presence. This can change with peer pressure. Once they are driving with friends, there is a tendency to drive to a different set of expectations which can lead to increased impulsivity and risk. Think about this example: Your son has recently passed his road test and he’s taking his girlfriend to a hockey game. He wants to impress her on how well he drives now that he has his full license. Next, imagine the same situation except his girlfriend’s mom is riding in the car and going to the game with them. Will he make the same decisions and drive the same way in both scenarios? Often the answer is no.

New Driver Risk Factors

There are plenty of outside influences that affect the way people drive and present increased risk to new drivers. Examples: Weather conditions, unfamiliar routes (with distractions caused by looking for direction signs), construction zones and traffic congestion are some. Also consider personal factors –

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tired from a late-night studying, worried about exams, excited about a big sports team win, sick, on medication and so on. All these factors add more risk to new drivers than they do to experienced drivers. Outside influences are likely affect the way you drive, too. Consider how you would drive on a day off, with plenty of time to enjoy your surroundings on a nice spring day. Then consider the same drive, only now you are going to be late for an important meeting with your boss. Do you make the same decisions – yellow light, lane change, speed choices...? We bet you don't! Influences like these greatly increase the risk for new drivers.

“Head Check”

Since all these factors are a part of life – unavoidable at times and bound to occur at some point, drivers need to have a strategy to identify and cope with these fluctuating levels of energy, emotion, health and varying driving conditions. The way to identify if any of these factors is present before driving is to do what we call the “Head Check”. Ask the student driver to “Tell me something that might affect your driving today” If they can't think of anything, you can prompt them with questions about health, energy, emotions (happy, worried, sad, excited, etc.) or possibly weather conditions, of traffic, or the route you plan to take. Once a factor is identified, discuss strategies on how to cope with the situation. Maybe your driver feels tired and not as alert as usual. Ask them to tell you what they could do to compensate for that – perhaps they need to work extra hard on attention and observation to avoid lulls in concentration. While you are having this conversation, ask open-ended questions – questions that can't be answered by a simple yes or no – to get them to think and participate in the discussion. Then once the driving practice is underway, make sure to remind them if necessary, to ensure they employ the strategies you discussed together.

Follow this process before every session. The goal is to have your driver go through this mental process every time they get behind the wheel, forever – even after their driver training is complete and they are fully licensed. Identify personal factors and have a strategy to deal with added risk.

Seat Adjustment:

Most drivers sit too far back with the seat back reclined too much. Here's how to adjust the seat to make sure the driver is in the best position to use the controls properly and the safety systems work best to protect the driver in a crash:

Seat cushion (bottom) – lower the seat cushion to the bottom of it is travel. Adjust the seat forward so when the driver pushes the accelerator pedal to the floor there is still a slight bend at the knee. This ensures the driver has enough leg travel to apply full pressure to the brake pedal in an emergency stop. The driver should sit low in the seat. This helps keep their vision up and looking far enough ahead. If the driver has trouble seeing over the steering wheel and dash, the seat bottom can be adjusted slightly upwards. For most drivers this isn't necessary. The seat back should be adjusted so the driver can reach the top of the steering wheel at 12 o'clock without pulling their shoulder away from the seat back. When they hold the steering wheel at the 9 and 3 hand position, they should have an approximately 90-degree bend in their elbows. If the steering wheel can be adjusted, this can help the driver find a position where their arms are in the right position. If adjustable, the head restraint should be set to support the main part of the skull, not too low on the neck. The driver's left foot should be in position

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on the rest pad, ready to brace the driver during braking and cornering. Both the brake and accelerator are operated with the right foot only. Keep the heel in place on the floor and pivot your foot/ankle to operate each pedal.

Mirror Adjustment:

Once the driver has adjusted the seat properly, the mirrors can be adjusted. The objective is to adjust the mirrors to achieve the widest field of view possible by eliminating the overlap of images in the side and rear-view mirrors. First, adjust the rear-view mirror to center, side-to-side and up-and-down. Then, lean your head to the left until you are close to touching the driver's door glass. With your head in that position, adjust your driver's side mirror so you can just see the rear part of the side of your car. For the right side, lean towards the center of the car and adjust the right side mirror the same way. When the driver returns to the normal seating position, they'll notice they do not see the side of the car in either of their side mirrors, but when you look at the images in the left, then center, then right mirrors you should see a continuation of the image with little or no gap or overlap. This helps reduce the blind spot and aids in shoulder checking. More about this later!

Additional Resources:

It is a good idea to have some reference material handy during supervised practice times. There are two useful ICBC publications that all learner drivers need to be familiar with. Both are available in hard copy at ICBC Driver Services Centres throughout the Province. They are also available for download or online viewing at the links below:

Learn to Drive Smart - <https://www.icbc.com/driver-licensing/driving-guides/Pages/Learn-to-Drive-Smart.aspx> - all the rules, signs, pavement markings etc.

Tuning Up For Drivers - <https://www.icbc.com/driver-licensing/driving-guides/Pages/Tuning-Up-for-Drivers.aspx> – full of tips helpful during in-car practice