

## From Toy Cars to Real Cars: Altering Texting and Driving Habits Through Influencing Young Children

As a toddler, my parents always buckled me into my car seat; in fact, I would throw a temper tantrum anytime they would forget to strap me in. As a teenager, I angrily scold my parents if they drive away without their seat belt secured. But I cannot blame them for failing to remember. After all, the adults of today grew up in a world without seat belt laws, and therefore, never developed the unconscious habit to buckle up before driving off. In a world of advancing technology, new problems have arisen, such as the pressing issue of texting while driving. This trend continues to flourish largely because of the increasing availability of cell phones, and I believe how parents use this technology will influence their children's future habits. According to a 2011 study, an astounding 48% of teenagers have witnessed their parents using their phone while driving ("Texting and Driving"). Studies from researchers at the University of Cambridge conclude that children mimic their parents' driving habits, whether those habits include healthy or unhealthy ones (Whitebread and Bingham 11). Because nearly 11 teenagers die every day from texting and driving, this issue requires immediate attention from society ("Texting and Driving"). Through focusing on encouraging parents to avoid using their cell phone while driving, I believe children will unconsciously gain similar habits, and in their teen years, will avoid texting while driving.

Because of the strength of influences, many teenagers drive similarly to their parents. For example, children whose parents have three or more traffic violations have a 38% higher chance of having a violation than children whose parents have none, suggesting that teenagers follow their parents' behaviors ("Relationship of Parent"). Roughly 27% of adults admit to texting and driving, emphasizing why their influence could contribute to teenage traffic deaths ("Texting and Driving"). While teenagers often reject their parents' ideals, children have much more susceptibility, provoking them to follow their parents' actions. If parents expose this positive influence to their children at a young age, when they have the most vulnerability towards information, I suspect drastic changes in teenage driving behaviors could occur.

Just like parental influences, the technology habits children form during the developmental stages of their life can greatly impact their future behaviors. Evidence points to brain development growing most rapidly from ages two to five ("Why Early Childhood"). During this period, helping young children avoid a dependency on technology could prevent an addiction in their teen years. If children grow into adolescents learning to use technology as a means of necessity, they should, as a result, have less of an inclination to reach for their phone while driving. Conclusively, to prevent this impulsive need for access to technology, parents should supervise electronic use from early childhood. Because habits developed early in life "are exceedingly difficult to change", parents should encourage practices of moderation in order for their children to have a lower chance of a future technology addiction (Plante). All in all, I believe encouraging parents to set a positive example for their children while driving, along with monitoring their time exposed to technology, offers the best long-term solution to this global problem. I propose that communities across the world take proactive initiatives through campaigning in order to spread awareness to parents about how their habits affect their children's futures. Hopefully, by the time the next generation sits behind the wheel, they will have the foundation to make the right choice. But in order for this to happen, adults need to step up to the plate and make changes in their own habits in order to have a more positive influence over prospective drivers.

## Works Cited

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