

Driver's Ed For Parents Helps Them Teach Teens

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In less than a year, Deborah Kinnard's two teenage sons will be climbing behind the wheel, so Kinnard wants to bone up so she can become the most effective driving teacher she can be. She started with a Parents Reducing Injury and Driver Error class, sanctioned by the Georgia Traffic Injury Prevention Institute.

"It was a good refresher," Kinnard said. "It made me more aware of what I need to do or not do, and the ways I can help or encourage (my kids) in constructive ways. There was just a lot of good tips for parents to help them constructively with their driving skills."

The next PRIDE class will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday in the Watkinsville Community Center. About 70 counties in Georgia, including Clarke, Madison and Oconee, have instructors who are certified to teach PRIDE, a program developed in 2003 - the same year that 16-year-old Joshua Brown died after his pickup hydroplaned and hit a tree.

Joshua's father, Alan Brown, had said his son never took driver's education and didn't know what to do when he lost control of his truck.

Joshua's death sparked a campaign to teach teen drivers techniques for safer driving and led to several reforms, including Joshua's Law, which required teens to have more experience on the road before getting a license.

Every year, more than 6,000 teens die in traffic crashes in the United States, including 200 in Georgia - making the state the fifth-deadliest for teens, according to the GTIPI.

Parents who sign up for the PRIDE class receive free information, including a driving log that helps them document how many hours their teen spends behind the wheel learning good driving techniques.

According to Georgia law, teens must accrue 40 hours driving - six of them at night - before they can apply for a driver's license.

"Parents don't have a clue what they need to do when they start this," said Oconee County Coroner Ed Carson. "This thing tells you what you need. ... It's all right there for you." Those who complete the class may also qualify for an insurance discount, he said.

As a coroner, Carson sees the worst of what can happen to novice drivers, so he organized the first PRIDE class in Oconee this summer.

"You have to ask yourself, when you go to the wreck scene of a teenage driver, if they'd had a little bit more education, would things have been different?" he said.

Parents are taught how to coach, stay calm and communicate with learners, said Leigh Ebelhar, parent youth outreach assistant for GTIPI.

"It's a complete eye-opener to the parents," Ebelhar said. "They really realize that driving is not something that follows the 'Do as I say not as I do' mantra. That really doesn't apply when they're trying to teach their teen how to drive."

PRIDE instructors also discuss the importance of wearing seat belts - almost two-thirds of teens die in crashes because they failed to buckle seat belts, Ebelhar said.

Elaine Anglin, an EMT for National EMS, is getting certified to teach a PRIDE class in Madison County and will share her personal story as a mother who lost her child in a tragic wreck in July 2008.

Her daughter, Brittni Dianne Gowan, 17, of Colbert, was killed after Gowan's 18-year-old boyfriend ran off the side of a stretch of Georgia Highway 281 near Royston. Both were killed; neither was wearing seat belts.

"My biggest thing is, I don't want another parent to have to go through what I went through because their child wasn't wearing a seat belt," Anglin said.