



Parents urged to lead by example as 81% admit risky driving habits – despite believing they're safe drivers

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With young drivers at greatest risk of serious crashes, research reveals children absorb their parents' driving habits from as young as three

- New research reveals some young people are replicating their parents' poor driving habits, including speeding and phone use, putting them at risk
- While three quarters (74%) of young drivers say they have adopted their parents' habits, 81% of parents admit to risky behaviour behind the wheel – despite believing they're safe drivers
- Admiral's latest claims data shows 17–21-year-old drivers are 66% more likely to be the driver in a collision that involves catastrophic bodily injuries versus drivers aged over 21 – with new Freedom of Information (FOIs) requests also revealing 17–24-year-olds are involved in a fifth of all serious and fatal collisions
- Dr Lisa Dorn, Associate Professor of Driver Behaviour at Cranfield University, says children pick up driving attitudes from as young as three or four
- The insurer is now urging parents and carers to understand the critical role they have in influencing driving behaviour from a young age

Parents may be unintentionally passing on dangerous driving habits to their children, new data from Admiral Group's UK Insurance business, Admiral suggests. In a study involving parents and young motorists, every parent said they believe they are always or sometimes a safe driver, despite 81% admitting to risky habits including speeding, using a phone behind the wheel and shouting at other road users.

As almost three-quarters (74%) of young drivers aged 17–21 say they have picked up driving habits from their parents, the data exposes the huge influence parents may be having over their children's habits long before they get behind the wheel – with children absorbing their parents' habits from as young as three years old.

The findings come as figures show young motorists face a disproportionately high risk on Britain's roads. A new Freedom of Information (FOI) request issued to UK police forces in May found that 17–24-year-olds are involved in a fifth of all serious and fatal collisions², while Admiral’s own UK claims data found 17–21-year-olds are 66% more likely to be the driver in a collision that involves the most catastrophic bodily injuries than drivers aged over 21³. The example parents set behind the wheel may be one factor shaping young drivers' behaviour.

Admiral’s research reveals a clear gap between what parents practice and what they preach. While 43% of young motorists said their parents taught them to drive, 41% reported inconsistency with what they’re told and what they see when their parents are driving. The disconnect is reflected in parents’ own admissions: while 92% say it’s unacceptable to use a phone while driving, almost a quarter (24%) admit to doing it.

While mixed messages may be influencing the next generation of motorists, many young drivers were found to mirror parents' behaviour:

Links between parent and young driver behaviour revealed by Admiral:

Driving habit	% of parents who admit to driving habit	% of young motorists who admit to driving habit
Driving with one hand on the wheel	41%	49%
Eating or drinking while driving	33%	42%
Experiencing road rage or shouting at other road users	24%	22%
Checking a phone while driving	24%	29%
Failing to indicate correctly	21%	23%
Driving above the speed limit	20%	23%

Admiral’s FOI request also revealed the top fixed term penalty notices issued to adults and young drivers, with speeding holding the top spot since 2024 for both groups⁴. Careless driving also consistently featured in the top 3 for young drivers, highlighting how they may be adopting their parents’ risky habits.

The findings have been revealed as part of Admiral’s new campaign ‘Mirror

Signal Mistake', which exposes the gap between what parents say and what they do when it comes to driving. A new film has also been released highlighting how children are absorbing habits long before they learn to drive, available to watch here.

To further understand the links between parent and child driver behaviour, Admiral has teamed up with Dr Lisa Dorn, Associate Professor of Driver Behaviour at Cranfield University and Founder of PsyDrive, to gather new insights on how children pick up behaviours long before they learn to drive.

Dr Dorn explains: *"Children begin picking up driving attitudes through observation from as young as three or four years old. Long before they understand the technical side of driving, they notice how their parents react emotionally and whether they follow the rules, and these early observations go on to shape how the child drives later in life."*

"Because children learn more from what parents do than what they say, a parent who promotes safety but drives distracted sends a mixed message, making the child more likely to copy the behaviour than follow the advice. When risky behaviour is repeated without immediate consequences, drivers can begin to see it as normal rather than dangerous."

James Armstrong, UK Motor Claims Director at Admiral, adds: *"Learning to drive starts long before someone gets behind the wheel. We know parents want their children to adopt safe driving behaviours when they're in the drivers' seat, so it's important to recognise the positive influence they can have and encourage everyone to reflect on the driving habits we can all improve."*

"By modelling safe behaviour every time they drive, parents can help shape positive driving habits in the next generation of drivers, and play an important role in supporting efforts to reduce the number of serious collisions involving young motorists."

For modelling safe driving and approaching conversations, **Dr Lisa Dorn** recommends: *"Change is more likely to last when parents view safe driving as part of their role as a caregiver and role model. If mistakes happen, acknowledging them openly rather than excusing them demonstrates accountability. Setting family-wide rules on issues such as phone use and seatbelts reinforces safety as a shared standard."*

Dr Dorn's top tips include:

- Be firm about safety rules, but stay supportive, approachable and willing to listen.
- Talk about driving safety regularly and encourage open conversations rather than relying on lectures.
- If your child points out an unsafe habit, acknowledge it and thank them for speaking up. This shows accountability and builds trust.
- Children learn more from what they see than what they are told, so consistently demonstrate the safe driving behaviours you want them to adopt.

As part of the 'Mirror Signal Mistake' campaign, actress Sheree Murphy reflects on her family's experience of modelling safe driving behaviours:

"As a mum of four, with three of them now driving themselves, I know how important it is to encourage them to be safe behind the wheel and to lead by example.

"I've seen first-hand just how much they picked up from me long before they took their first driving lesson. They watch everything we do – the good habits as well as the bad ones – even when we don't realise they're paying attention.

"That's why it's important for parents to take a moment to reflect on their own driving habits, because those everyday journeys are teaching our children more than we might think. Small changes in the way we drive today could really help our children become safer, and better drivers in the future."

For more information and practical advice on how to model safer driving behaviours and have positive conversations about good driving habits and road safety, visit [admiral.com/teachthemwell](https://www.admiral.com/teachthemwell)

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