

# PFA Tips

## Time to Think About Driving?

I realize the last time I really thought about Driver's Ed was back in ancient times when I attended high school. You know, back in the infancy of the motorized vehicle. So what do parents need to think about for their soon-to-be driving teens (or IF they should be driving)?

### How do I know if my son/daughter is ready to drive?

Your son/daughter can undergo an evaluation to determine if they should drive or explore other transportation means.

Montgomery College offers an "Inclusive Driver Education Program Assessment of Driver Education Readiness" assessment form ([http://www2.montgomerycollege.edu/departments/wdce/brochures/DriverEd\\_special%20needs\\_ReadinessIndicatorsAssessment.pdf](http://www2.montgomerycollege.edu/departments/wdce/brochures/DriverEd_special%20needs_ReadinessIndicatorsAssessment.pdf)). These indicators can help you to determine whether to begin the driver education process.

The Maryland State Department of Education Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) has The Adaptive Driving Program (<http://dors.maryland.gov/consumers/WTC/RTS/Pages/driving.aspx>) which evaluates and trains individuals with disabilities to drive and obtain a driver's license from the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA). While they offer the 6-hour classroom training, they do not conduct on-the-road training.

### What should I look for in a Driver's Ed program?

- Driver improvement lessons
- Instruction for parents on how to teach the driver-to-be
- Instructors with specialized training in working with students with special needs
- Classroom instruction which provides the necessary accommodations
- A program that provides supplemental materials for additional reinforcement of skills and concepts
- A program that provides a continuum of services and programs (Learner's Permit Preparation course, Driver's Education for students with Mild to Moderate Disabilities, Disciplined Attention, etc.)

### What if my son/daughter needs more time than the typical [6 week] program?

Each state's MVA has a designated curriculum that must be followed and adhered to with

regards to instructional materials and resources, classroom instruction, Behind the Wheel (BTW) hours, etc. Check to see if the program provides instruction that is provided over a period of time rather than condensed in a short period of time. Identify which programs provide Driver Improvement Lessons to allow students the opportunity to practice the necessary skills required to drive safely in addition to the regular BTW hours required by the state.

### What if my son/daughter is nervous about driving with someone other than a parent?

One of the indicators of whether or not a student is ready to drive is can he/she drive independently of the parent with the instructor. It is imperative that the student is able to drive with the instructor and not feel anxious. This is not to say the student will not be nervous, as this is natural, but if it prohibits the student from driving without the parent, the family should consider waiting to such a time in which they feel comfortable.

### What should I be doing when I'm letting my son/daughter practice driving at home?

Work with the instructor to ensure you are using the same language and techniques to provide consistency.

You can start driving in a local parking lot which has enough space to allow the person to practice stopping, accelerating, using the turn signals, checking the mirrors, etc. Practice driving on quiet neighborhood streets to allow the person to practice their driving skills without too much traffic. It is best to practice during non-rush hours and gradually build up to more commercial roadways and highways. Parents can have students practice observation skills by identifying objects in the distance as a passenger in the car and then as the driver (upcoming traffic lights, brake lights in the distance, road signs, etc.).

Too often young and new drivers are involved in accidents because they lack experience. Here



are some talking points:

- Discuss distractions: No playing/changing stations on the radio while driving; no cell phone use including hands-free devices while driving.
- Rules of the road: Distance from the car in front of you; respecting other drivers (don't cut someone off); obeying road signs (Yield, Stop, Merge areas, etc.).
- Weather conditions: How rain, sleet, snow can change the way the car reacts while driving or turning.
- Areas to drive in: Some people do not like driving in the city because of the congestion or aggressive drivers. Plan a route before they leave so they know where they are going.
- Teach them how to use navigation: Navigation systems can be incredibly helpful. Try to find a system that has voice prompts so they do not have to pay attention to the screen while driving. Keep in mind that GPS devices may speak and direct differently. You may want to drive in an area that you are familiar with while the GPS directs you so you can hear when and how it will offer directions and help the student understand that roads and highways may be redirected. You may also want to check that your GPS has up-to-date maps.

### What if I would prefer not to be the person with whom my son/daughter practices driving?

Ask the driving school if they will provide all 60 hours of required drive time to get the license if that is something you need. Be advised that this would be an additional fee to the base instruction. You could also try asking

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another family member who meets the driving requirements.

**Will the person be given additional time to take the written driver's test if he is granted additional time on his IEP or 504?**

The written test is 15 minutes, however the oral test is not timed. If the person is not able to take the written test, the first option is that the questions are read by a computer and also appear on screen for the person to read. If the person is unable to do the test with the computer, the questions can be read by someone at the MVA but you must make an appointment. You must also attempt to take the test using the computer first.

**What does the road test entail?**

Maryland has changed part of the driving test for getting a license. Now you have to pass a closed course and a road course. While driving on the road course the individual has to react to instructions which are dictated during the test. The individual MUST make sure that they carefully listen to the instructor because any slight deviation from the instructions can lead to failure of the test. Since part of the driving test has to be taken on the public roads, families should really evaluate where they set the student up to take the test as different areas have different traffic patterns.

**Does it matter what car we use for the test?**

The car that the individual is taking the test in has to be insured and be able to pass inspection. The MVA has a Vehicle Checklist. The vehicle will be disqualified for testing if it is deemed to be unsafe in accordance with the checklist. If this occurs, you will need to reschedule your driving test for another time.

Be open to alternative transportation  
If your son/daughter is not going to be able to drive, consider what alternate means of transportation she can use to increase her independence.

**A rule is a rule is a rule**

"Our kids are rule followers, which is a major asset in driving. Once they know the rules, they will never vary from them. The biggest problem with our ASD kids driving is their inability to anticipate what others on the road will do. This is a challenge, and requires constant reinforcement. Our kids know they will follow the rules of the road, but they have to think ahead of the dumb things others will do that could endanger them. For example, a yellow light means slow down. In Maryland, it means "speed up", and my son has been rear-ended a few times by people who were incredulous that he slowed down for a yellow light.

"John knew the rules of the road before we ever went out in a car together, and even then, we started in a parking lot (but don't we all, even with our neurologically typical children?). We worked on anticipating what other drivers could or would do. Speed is a problem, because in Maryland the speed limit seems to be a guideline, and not a rule! We worked out a deal where he could go 10% over the speed limit, and that was an easy calculation for him to figure and obey." Sue Ford, mother of young adult driver

**My child is too young to drive, but are there ways to begin practice now?**

Playing video games isn't necessarily all play and no work. There are several video games

on the market for systems such as Xbox and PlayStation that use steering wheels and pedals. You can even find packages and accessories like the Playseat chair, steering wheel and pedals.

Mowing the lawn and riding a bike can help with processing information that is required when driving, such as adapting to situations on the road, spatial relations, processing a variety of stimuli and responding appropriately, and exhibiting sustained attention. The parent should model good driving habits as the student learns to drive as they see how their parent drives. Model thinking out loud what you are doing, decisions you are making while you are driving so she can be able to identify appropriate responses. Have the students provide a commentary of what you are doing while driving such as using your turn signal when making a turn, stopping for the stop sign, and following road signs.

**Insurance**

Finally, a lot of families forget that when they add a young driver to their insurance policy it can greatly affect the premiums. Make sure when your son/daughter is ready to drive you prepare your finances to handle any difference in premiums. Speaking with your insurance agent can help to find out the cost of adding the driver.

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**Additional Resources**

From the MVA: How to Prepare for Your Maryland Noncommercial Class Driver's Test  
[http://www.mva.maryland.gov/\\_resources/docs/prepare-for-noncom-driving-test.pdf](http://www.mva.maryland.gov/_resources/docs/prepare-for-noncom-driving-test.pdf)

PFA Tips: Navigating the MVA for State IDs, Driver's Licenses and Other Services  
<http://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/maryland-services/pfa-tips-navigating-the-mva>

"Rules of the Road," discusses some of the challenges faced by individuals with ASD who hope to drive  
[https://www.iancommunity.org/cs/adults/driving\\_with\\_asd](https://www.iancommunity.org/cs/adults/driving_with_asd)

Teaching the Person With Autism HOW to DRIVE - <http://parentpals.com/gossamer/pages/Detailed/585.html>

When are Autistic Teens Ready to Drive? - <https://psychcentral.com/news/2012/01/10/when-are-autistic-teens-ready-to-drive/33493.html>

Search the Pathfinders for Autism database for Driver Education programs. Select Transportation>Driver's Education - <http://pathfindersforautism.org/providers-services/>

Drive Focus mobility app develops traffic awareness and visual search skills needed for driving - <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/id881318385>