

## DRIVING LESSONS - COMPLETE GUIDE (TEENS 14–18 YEARS)

**Executive Summary:** Driving overwhelms teens with visual overload (signs, lights, glare), spatial judgment demands (parking, lane keeping), noise (horns, engines), executive function pressure (route planning, decisions), and social stress (other drivers, police encounters). This guide uses a 20-hour structured progression starting in empty parking lots, adds visual checklists and scripts, arranges DMV accommodations first, and teaches emergency response protocols. The goal: mastery built in safe stages, no shortcuts, celebration of every small win.

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### WHY DRIVING FEELS TERRIFYING

Driving combines sensory overload, spatial judgment, executive function, social pressure, and high-stakes decision-making all at once. The stakes feel huge—one mistake could cause injury. Many teens panic on highways, freeze at 4-way stops, or struggle with parking. Starting too fast or in heavy traffic causes meltdowns and reinforces fear.

#### Sensory + Executive Profile Checklist

Challenge Area	What It Feels Like
Visual Overload	Highway signs flashing, headlights glaring, dashboard lights, lane markings
Spatial Judgment	Parking accuracy, lane keeping, turning radius, pedestrian distance, mirror blind spots
Sound	Horns honking, engine revving, tires squealing, GPS voice, other drivers yelling
Executive Function	Route memorization, gas station timing, insurance cards, emergency decisions
Social Anxiety	Road rage exposure, police encounters, carpool expectations, judging glances

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### PRE-DRIVING: DMV ACCOMMODATIONS FIRST

Before booking any lessons, contact your state's DMV to request accommodations for the written test and road test. Most states allow extra time and quiet testing rooms for documented autism.

**Email or call your DMV:**

"I am applying for a learner's permit and will be taking the written driving test. I have documented autism spectrum disorder and need accommodations. I request: extra test time (time-and-a-half or doubled), a quiet testing room, and visual materials if permitted. What documentation do you need from me?"

**What to gather:**

- Copy of autism diagnosis (from doctor or school IEP)
- Parent ID and proof of address
- \$25–50 testing fee (varies by state)

**Most states approve:**

- Extra 50% test time (30 minutes instead of 20)
- Quiet room (no other test-takers nearby)
- Visual checklist or reference sheet (depends on state)

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**PREPARE THE VEHICLE + ENVIRONMENT**

**Designated Learner Vehicle**

Choose ONE consistent car for all practice. This car should:

- Have clear mirrors (adjust once, keep settings)
- Have responsive brakes (not too sensitive, not too soft)
- Have quiet interior (no rattling, good soundproofing)
- Have working headlights, turn signals, and wipers

**Mark the car clearly:** Learner permit sticker on back window (legal requirement in most states).

**Remove Distractions**

- Phone: Parent keeps it, not in driver's hand

- Music: Off during lessons
  - Passenger chatter: Parent only, quiet support
  - GPS: Set route BEFORE driving (parent enters address)
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## **WHAT TO PACK + PREPARE**

### **Visual Aids:**

- Laminated "Pre-Driving Checklist" (mirrors, seat, seatbelt, lights, ignition order)
- Route flashcards with turn-by-turn directions
- 2×2 laminated card: "EMERGENCY: Pull over. Hazard lights. Parent takes wheel."

### **Comfort Items:**

- Noise-canceling headphones (passenger seat, not while driving)
- Weighted steering wheel cover (calms proprioceptive anxiety)
- Water bottle
- Protein snack (nuts, cheese, granola bar - nut allergy warning)

### **Emergency Kit:**

- Parent's cell number laminated on dashboard
- Learner's permit + proof of insurance (in glove box)
- DMV accommodations letter (for road test)
- Roadside emergency kit (flashlight, jumper cables, first aid)
- Spare car key

### **Documents:**

- Learner's permit (required by law to practice)
  - Parent's valid driver's license (required in vehicle)
  - Insurance card (required)
  - DMV accommodations letter (bring to road test)
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## **20-HOUR PROGRESSION SCHEDULE (Minimum)**

### **Hours 1–5: Empty Parking Lot (Speed Control + Turns)**

**Location:** Large, empty parking lot (school, church, or shopping center during off-hours).  
NO other cars.

#### **Lesson 1 checklist:**

1. Adjust seat (reach pedals comfortably)
2. Adjust mirrors (left, right, rearview all clear)
3. Seatbelt buckled + headrest adjusted
4. Lights on (parking lot practice needs visibility)
5. Start engine (key or button)
6. Foot on brake, shift to Drive
7. Slow release of brake, gentle acceleration
8. Circle parking lot at 5–10 mph

#### **Lesson 2–3 practice:**

- Drive in straight line (lane control)
- Figure-8 pattern (left + right turns practice)
- Wide U-turn + narrow U-turn
- Smooth braking (not jerky)

#### **Lesson 4–5 practice:**

- Empty parking space practice (slow approach, center vehicle)
- Forward parking into space
- 3-point turn (reverse + realign)

**Parent script:** "Good. Smooth. You're controlling the car. Keep eyes forward. Gentle on the wheel."

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### **Hours 6–10: Quiet Neighborhood Streets (Stop Signs)**

**Location:** Residential streets with 25 mph speed limit, minimal traffic, few pedestrians.

**Lesson 6 checklist:**

- Pre-drive checklist (mirrors, seatbelt, lights)
- Approach stop sign (coast to stop, not sudden)
- Full stop (2 seconds, look all directions)
- Slow acceleration from stop
- Turn with signal (announce before turning)

**Lesson 7–8 practice:**

- Multiple stop signs in row
- Left turns at stop signs
- Right turns at stop signs
- Pedestrian awareness (slow down near parks, schools)

**Lesson 9–10 practice:**

- Smoother stop-and-go flow
- Following distance (3-second rule: pick a landmark, count "1-Mississippi, 2-Mississippi, 3-Mississippi")
- Lane position (stay centered)

**Parent script:** "Stop sign coming. Slow down. Coast to the stop. Full stop. Look left, right, left. Go when clear."

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**Hours 11–15: Traffic Lights + Multi-Way Stops**

**Location:** Busier residential or light commercial areas with traffic lights, 35–45 mph speed, moderate traffic.

**Lesson 11 checklist:**

- Green light = proceed (check for turning cars first)
- Yellow light = slow down, prepare to stop
- Red light = full stop, wait for green
- Turning on red = if allowed, after full stop and checking

**Lesson 12–13 practice:**

- Multiple traffic lights in sequence
- 4-way stops (take turns, watch other drivers)
- Yielding to pedestrians (full stop, patient wait)
- Right turns on green
- Left turns with traffic (wait for oncoming cars to pass)

**Lesson 14–15 practice:**

- Busier intersections with multiple lanes
- Merging into traffic (speed up to match flow, signal first)
- Defensive driving (assume other drivers don't see you)

**Parent script:** "Traffic light turning yellow. Brake smoothly. Stop line here. Watch the pedestrians. Green—look left, right, left, then go."

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**Hours 16–20: Highway Entry/Exit + Speed Management**

**Location:** Limited-access road or light highway (50–55 mph), with on-ramps and exit ramps.

**Lesson 16 checklist:**

- Acceleration lane (speed up to match traffic before merging)
- Merging onto highway (signal, check mirror, steady lane change)
- Steady speed (cruise control optional after mastery)
- Lane changes (signal, mirror check, side-view glance, move)

**Lesson 17–18 practice:**

- Multiple merges and lane changes
- Exiting highway (slow down gradually on exit ramp)
- Roundabouts (if in your area)
- Heavier traffic tolerance

**Lesson 19–20 practice:**

- Faster highway speed (up to 60 mph if comfortable)
- More complex exits (curving ramps, multiple lanes)
- Brief night driving (if ready)

**Parent script:** "Merge lane coming. Speed up to match traffic. Signal. Check mirror. Smooth lane change. Good."

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## **PARENT SCRIPTS - EXACT WORDS TO USE**

### **Before lesson starts:**

"Empty lot is safe. No traffic stress. We'll run the checklist first. You control the speed. I'm here to guide."

### **During mirror check:**

"Left mirror clear? Right mirror clear? Rearview mirror clear? Good. Signal on."

### **Lane keeping:**

"Steering wheel controls your direction. Small movements. Imagine a line down the middle of your lane. Stay on it."

### **Smooth braking:**

"Brake = steady pressure. Not sudden. Not soft. Smooth and firm. You're doing it."

### **Emergency stop (practice):**

"Brake hard. Pedal to the floor. Hazard lights on. Safe stop = success."

### **Panic moment (real):**

"Pull over safe. Turn on hazard lights. Park. Breathe. I'm taking the wheel. You're safe."

### **After meltdown:**

"You handled hard things. That was brave. We'll try again tomorrow with a shorter session."

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## **VISUAL PRE-DRIVE CHECKLIST (Laminate This)**

Print and laminate this checklist. Tape it to the sun visor. Your teen checks off each item before starting:

### **PRE-DRIVE CHECKLIST**

Seat adjusted (reach pedals)

- Left mirror clear
  - Right mirror clear
  - Rearview mirror clear
  - Seatbelt buckled
  - Headrest adjusted
  - Phone put away
  - Route confirmed (no GPS errors)
  - Lights tested (if night)
  - Wipers tested (if rain)
  - Foot on brake
  - Shift to Drive or Reverse
  - Slow brake release
  - Begin
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## **DMV ROAD TEST PREPARATION**

### **Mock Road Test Checklist**

Practice these exact skills in this exact order (matches DMV format):

1. **License + Insurance:** Present both documents
2. **Vehicle inspection:** Examiner checks lights, wipers, signals
3. **Pre-drive adjustments:** Mirrors, seatbelt, position
4. **Parking lot test:** Reverse parking (straight back), 3-point turn
5. **Left turn:** Signal, check mirror, turn on green
6. **Right turn:** Signal, check mirror, turn on red (if clear)
7. **Stop sign:** Full stop, 2-second pause, clear check
8. **4-way stop:** Yield properly, wait for turn
9. **Speed control:** Maintain posted limit (not too fast, not too slow)

10. **Parking:** Pull into marked space, center vehicle
11. **Parking: Parallel:** Nose in, backup, straighten (if required)
12. **Final questions:** Vehicle control check, safety knowledge

### **DMV Road Test Scripts to Practice**

**When examiner says:** "Follow my instructions exactly. Begin when ready."

**You say:** "I'm ready. I'll drive carefully and follow all your directions."

**When examiner says:** "Turn right at the next intersection."

**You do:** Signal 100 feet before, slow down, check left-right-left, turn smoothly.

**When examiner says:** "Stop immediately!"

**You do:** Brake hard, put hazard lights on, put vehicle in Park safely.

**When examiner says:** "Park here."

**You do:** Signal, center between lines, smooth stop, turn off engine.

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### **MELTDOWN RECOVERY (On the Road)**

1. **Pull over SAFE immediately:** Turn on hazard lights, coast to edge of road, put vehicle in Park
2. **Parent takes wheel:** You move to passenger seat (legal requirement)
3. **AirPods + breathing:** Noise-canceling headphones, slow breath in-out, no pressure
4. **Protein snack + water:** Blood sugar crash = panic amplifier
5. **No discussion during panic:** Only once calm (10+ minutes later)
6. **Resume next day:** Shorter session, return to easier level (parking lot if needed)
7. **Celebrate parking lot mastery:** "You drove a car. That's a huge skill."

**Important:** It's OK to stop a lesson. Pushing through meltdowns teaches fear, not skill.

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### **BIOMEDICAL SUPPORT DURING DRIVING LESSONS**

**Brain glucose depletion:** Visual processing of road, mirrors, signs, and pedestrians demands enormous glucose. Pre-lesson protein + complex carbs prevents fatigue and panic.

**Protein + carbs (30 minutes before lesson):**

- Oatmeal + nuts (nut allergy warning)
- Turkey sandwich + apple
- Yogurt + granola
- Cheese + whole grain crackers
- Hard-boiled egg + toast

**Magnesium glycinate:** 200 mg evening before lesson (calms spatial anxiety, improves sleep) *Consult doctor*

**B-vitamins (B6, B12):** Support reaction time and nervous system (morning) *Consult doctor*

**Caffeine:** Avoid or minimize (jittery hands = poor steering control)

**Sleep:** Non-negotiable 8+ hours (tired driving = reactive, not thoughtful)

**Omega-3s:** 1000 mg daily (supports visual processing) *Consult doctor*

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**POST-LESSON REFLECTION CHECKLIST**

After every lesson, ask:

- What skills did you practice today?
- How many panic-free minutes? (build from 5 → 15 → 30)
- What felt easiest? Hardest?
- DMV readiness today (1–10)?
- What's our focus next lesson?

Track progress—it shows improvement over weeks.

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**PROGRESS TRACKING LOG**

Milestone	Hours Completed	Confidence (1–10)	Notes
Parking lot basics	___ / 5	___	Started lane control
Neighborhood streets	___ / 5	___	Stop signs mastered

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Hours Completed</b>	<b>Confidence (1-10)</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Traffic lights	___ / 5	___	4-way stops practiced
Highway merging	___ / 5	___	Speed management OK
<b>DMV Road Test</b>	<b>PASSED / FAILED</b>	___ / 10	<b>License status</b>

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