Putting the Brakes on Teenage Driving

Specific Purpose: To persuade you that the best way to prevent auto accidents by teenage drivers is to raise the age for full driving privileges to 18.

Central Idea: After reviewing the problem of teenage driving accidents and their causes, I want to persuade you that the best way to these accidents is to raise the age for full driving privileges to 18.

Introduction

1. On a chilly November night, a Ford Explorer charged down a California highway.
   1. The 16-year-old driver and three of his friends were returning from a concert when the driver lost control of the car.
   2. The driver and one passenger were killed; the other two passengers were severely injured.
   3. One of the passengers was my nephew, who will be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.
2. Tragic auto accidents involving teenage drivers are much too common in all parts of the United States.
3. After researching the subject, I have come to agree with the experts that the best way to prevent such accidents is to raise the age for full driving privileges to 18.
4. I know from my audience-analysis questionnaire that most of you oppose such a plan, but I ask you to listen with an open mind while we discuss the problems associated with teenage driving, the major causes of the problems, and a plan that will help solve the problems.

Body

1. There are too many motor vehicle accidents, deaths, and injuries involving teenage drivers.
   1. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, while teenagers make up 7 percent of the nation’s licensed drivers, they represent 14 percent of all motor vehicle fatalities.
   2. Last year alone 8,666 people were killed in automobile accidents involving teenage drivers—almost exactly the number of full-time students on this campus.
   3. Evidence also shows that the younger the driver, the greater the risk.
      1. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 16-year-olds have “the highest percentage of crashes involving speeding, the highest percentage of single-vehicle crashes, and the highest percentage of crashes with driver error.”
      2. USA Today reports that 16-year-olds are three times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes than are other drivers.

(Transition: Now that we’ve seen the extent of the problem, we can explore its causes.)

1. There are four major causes of the problem.
   1. One of the causes is inexperience.
      1. New drivers haven’t had enough time on the road to develop their driving skills.
      2. Of course, inexperience is not the only cause, since there will always be inexperienced drivers—even if the driving age were raised to 21 or even to 25.
   2. A second cause is revealed by brain research.
      1. Findings from the National Institute of Mental Health show that the brain of an average 16-year-old has not developed to the point where he or she is able to judge the risk of a given situation.
      2. A five-year study of traffic records by Steven Lowenstein, a medical professor at the University of Colorado, shows that “deliberate risk-taking and dangerous and aggressive driving behaviors predominated” among 16-year-old drivers.
   3. A third cause of motor vehicle fatalities among teenage drivers is night driving.
      1. According to the Washington Post, when 16-year-olds get behind the wheel after dark, the likelihood of having an accident increases several times over.
      2. Nighttime driving is less safe for everyone, but it becomes particularly dangerous when combined with a younger driver’s inexperience and reduced ability to gauge risk.
   4. A fourth cause of accidents is the presence of teenage passengers in the car.
      1. We all know what it’s like to drive with friends in the car, the stereo up loud, cell phones ringing, everyone laughing and having a good time.
      2. Unfortunately, all these factors create distractions that too often result in accidents, injury, and death.
      3. Allan Williams, chief scientist at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, reports that one teenage passenger doubles the risk of a fatal crash, while the risk is five times greater with two or more passengers.

(Transition: The extent of the problem is clear. So, too, are its major causes. What steps can we take to help bring about a solution?)

1. There are three major steps we can take to solve the problem.
   1. First, we need a national policy that no one can receive a learner’s permit until age 16 and no one can receive full driving privileges until age 18.
      1. This will give 16-year-olds time to gain more driving experience before having an unrestricted license.
      2. It will also allow them to reach a stage of brain development where they are better able to handle the risk and responsibility of driving.
   2. Second, we need to restrict nighttime driving so as to keep younger drivers off the road when conditions are riskiest.
      1. Some states have tried to address this problem by banning teenagers from driving after midnight or 1 a.m., but as the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports, these laws don’t go far enough.
      2. According to the Institute, we need a 9:00 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. limit until drivers reach the age of 18.
   3. Third, we need to limit the number of teenage passengers in cars driven by younger drivers.
      1. Kevin Quinlan of the National Transportation Safety Board states that “passenger restriction is the first and foremost measure you can take” to reduce teenage driving fatalities.
      2. According to Quinlan, new drivers age 17 or younger should not have any passengers unless the riders are adults or family members.
      3. Drivers from age 17 to 18 should not be allowed to carry more than one teenage passenger.
   4. This plan might sound harsh or inconvenient, but it is a necessary step.
      1. The evidence is clear that it would save a significant number of lives.
      2. What’s truly harsh, says one father whose 17-year-old son died in an accident, is “being awakened at 2:30 in the morning by the State Patrol telling you that your son’s just been killed.”

Conclusion

1. This year alone several thousand teenage drivers won’t live long enough to attend college.
2. There is no way to solve all the problems we encounter on the road, but we can do something to help save the lives of younger drivers and to make the road safer for all of us.
3. My plan may seem harsh or inconvenient, but I know my nephew would gladly trade both for the chance to walk again.