



Your Role as Coach

*The collected wisdom of experienced in-car driving coaches
for volunteers in the Tire Rack Street Survival® program.*



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Acknowledgments

This booklet is a distillation of the advice and experience of hundreds of men and women who have participated in the development of the Tire Rack Street Survival® curriculum during the past several years. Though an ambitious undertaking, teaching our newest drivers to survive behind the wheel is a worthy goal.

The content (derived from conversations with Bill Wade, the National Program Manager of Tire Rack Street Survival®, and with coaches across the country) reflects the solutions to problems commonly encountered while working with teen drivers at the Street Survival events.

In addition, this booklet draws heavily on my own experience in training instructors of high performance driving. Although Tire Rack Street Survival® does not in any way seek to teach high speed track or racing skills, the problems of communicating in real time while traveling in a moving vehicle are similar. The skills of on-track instructors transfer readily to the coaching requirements of Tire Rack Street Survival® exercises.

I have also drawn upon the insights of Mike Linderman and Gary Brozek, authors of *The Teen Whisperer*. Their book makes the psychology and attitudes of teenagers accessible to mature adults who may have long forgotten what their own teen years were like.

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My thanks to all those who give so generously of their time and talent helping to spare teenagers the grim consequences of overdriving themselves and their automobiles.

Richmond Shreve
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Cover Photo
Jon van Woerden

Disclaimer

Operating a motor vehicle is an inherently dangerous activity and no course of instruction or coaching activity can make it otherwise. Neither the author, nor Tire Rack Street Survival®, nor any of its sponsors or volunteers or contributors offers any warranty that this document or the practices it describes will avert accidents, injuries, or deaths, even if such purposes may have been discussed with any of them. Readers must determine the suitability of the information presented here in the context of their particular circumstances before acting on it. Drivers assume sole responsibility for the safe operation of their vehicles, notwithstanding anything described or suggested by this document or those who apply the concepts offered herein.

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Photos: Will Atkinson



It's about more than driving - it's about LIVING!

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Purpose

The Tire Rack Street Survival® course is designed to give new drivers hands-on experience with the handling limits of their vehicles in real-world situations in order to encourage the development of superior skills and judgment which will enhance the students' ability to maintain control and avoid accidents.

Introduction – On Coaching a Teen

Chances are that you already have more technical knowledge and driving skill than you need to act in the role of driving coach. Although this booklet outlines those skills, its main purpose is to help you be effective in coaching teenagers.

Though we may have parented teens ourselves, decades separate us from our own teen years, and we may have forgotten or maybe never really thought about the world of a contemporary teen and how the activity of driving a car figures in his or her life. *(As driving skill is not gender specific, the personal pronouns (his, her, him, and hers) will be used interchangeably in reference to students for the remainder of this document.)*

Coming of Age

For a teen, driving is about vastly more than transportation. Many cultural and some very personal milestones mark coming of age; but in our greater society, the most common rite of passage is learning to drive and being trusted with the keys to the family car—ultimately with owning one's own wheels.

Driving is a highly visible adult activity that confers status and independence, and spans all social, gender, and ethnic distinctions. Being able to drive separates a teen from younger contemporaries and opens a new world of social opportunity and personal freedom. For some kids the car becomes the first really private place where their behavior and conversations are not being monitored by adults—where they are truly on their own.

Even for adults, cars are important status symbols. Your ride says a lot about you. A late model car (or cars) denotes success. Some cars are considered statements of prestige and wealth. Others represent youth and adventure. Teens are not blind to the symbolism.



Teens arrive at driving age in the midst of an avalanche of other new experiences. They are in the final years of physical maturation with all the hormonal changes and turmoil that puberty brings. Dating behavior is new. For the first time in their lives they are physically as large as their parents, or larger. Girls have become young women, and with makeup and certain clothing styles they can appear far more mature than they are. The boys' facial hair and deeper voices signal that they have become young men, eligible for military enlistment and other adult roles. Appearances of maturity are often deceptive. The self-absorption of childhood is only beginning to give way to a more adult sense of community. Teens are creating their personal public identities and breaking away from being known only as someone's daughter or son. Many teens achieve special recognition in academics or sports that reaches well beyond the circle of family and immediate friends.

During their early twenties, their focus shifts from learning information and skills to applying what they've learned. But, as teens, they are still inexperienced students striving to be treated as independent adults.

Coaching Teens

In the context of teens coming of age, driving coaches will encounter special issues. To begin examining those issues, put yourself in the role of the student you will be coaching.

You studied the book and got your learner's driving permit. You practiced driving at every opportunity.

You got lectured about how 200,000 teenagers are hurt in auto accidents each year. Maybe your school showed you grisly videos of accidents in which kids died, and it was predicted that this year 5,000 kids like you would be auto fatalities. You know of a kid from school who almost got killed in an accident. You've been told that cars are far and away the leading cause of teen deaths. But you "know" it won't happen to you.

You were observed, maybe by a uniformed policeman, as you completed your road test. Maybe you needed more than one try to succeed, but finally the big moment came and you got the laminated photo ID card certifying you as an authorized motor vehicle operator.

Though you have the license, Mom and Dad treat you as if you were still driving on a learner's permit. (Note: Some Tire Rack Street Survival® students are still driving on learner's permits.) By your parents' postures and comments, it's all too clear that they still don't trust your skills. Too often Mom's foot thumps on the passenger-side floorboard as she reflexively stabs for the brake pedal. And now, underscoring their lack of confidence, they insist that you must take this additional course.

You believe yourself to be a better driver than either your mom or dad. He can't parallel park, and she once backed over your bike in the driveway. You want to say, "Come on, Mom, give it a rest, will ya?"

When you arrive at the track, you see a bunch of orange traffic cones scattered around the parking lot. It all looks pretty Mickey Mouse. You're herded into a classroom where some older guy (he's got to be at least 35) is getting ready to do a power-point lecture.

You think, "Oh well, I guess I'll go through the motions, otherwise Dad won't give me the keys."

As a coach you'll be working against such attitudes and misconceptions. Your student driver won't know much of anything about the event or about you in your role as coach. He also doesn't have much of an idea about what the day's experiences will include. He'll have some expectations based on school and his relationship with his parents. (You can bet those expectations won't all be *good*.)

He may have gone to a formal driver education class where he spent hours listening to someone lecture about driving, while having had only a very limited amount of seat time actually operating the school's car. Worse yet, there may have been a couple of his peers sitting in the back seat giggling at every mistake. Your student may well be arriving with a lot of baggage.

Notwithstanding the challenges, practically every Tire Rack Street Survival® participant ends the day having had a great time doing the exercises. The sooner you can establish that receptive mood of fun, curiosity, and opportunity, the more the student will benefit. That's the purpose of this manual – **to aid you in rapidly creating a safe and efficient environment for learning accident avoidance skills**. Consider *attitude*, both how you shape the student's and *how you adjust your own* so that you both can have a good time. In the following pages you will find helpful insights and practical tips to deal effectively with just about any teen student.



Photo: Jon van Woerden

Coach and Student

It's about respect and honesty

Experts who work with teens say that first and foremost you need to model respect and honesty in the way you relate. Kids recognize manipulation – they've been practicing it on their parents for years. They respond favorably to clarity and directness.

As coach, your primary concern is safety, followed closely by achieving the learning objectives. Affirm these aims early on, then stress having fun and freely share your personal enjoyment of cars and driving.

Be Open

Break the ice by asking the student about her car and driving experiences. Here are some possible questions to open a conversation:

- What do you like about this car?
- Is this the car you usually drive?
- What would you like as a car of your own?
- Is this your first time doing car-control exercises?

The tone and content of your student's answers will tell you a lot about her personality. We'll consider how you make practical use of this information later (see Student Personalities, Page 13.) After listening to the student's answers, segue into the fun you expect to have. "We're going to have fun in the car today. Would that be okay with you?"

At first you may get short, non-committal answers such as, "I guess" and "maybe" with little or no eye-contact. Don't be put off, just keep on being open and friendly. Student attitudes transform dramatically during the first exercise.

Be Professional

In your role as coach, you are not looking for acceptance or approval from the teen. A professional can be caring, respectful, and honest without being a "buddy." Authentic professionalism garners trust and respect; it's not the same as holding yourself superior or aloof to the rookie driver you are teaching.

As a professional, you are fostering a psychologically and physically safe environment for learning. By your confidence and overall demeanor, you let the student know that you are in control of the situation.

The physical risks of exploring the limits of car and driver in Tire Rack Street Survival® may be intuitively obvious, but the psychological ones may not be as apparent especially to you as an experienced expert driver. Your students may dread being made to look foolish or inept.

Perhaps your student has been driving for a year. In that time, the basic piloting skills have become second nature and fully automatic. But experience has not fully sharpened her driving judgment. Maybe she has trouble merging smoothly from a side street into the flow of traffic or backing the car down a driveway. Occasionally a traffic situation surprises her, causing her to jerk the wheel or punch the brake pedal. She's extra cautious, especially when

Teens probably don't cut themselves much slack in these situations. They want to look good, to appear cool and competent. Though they are rookie drivers, they don't want anyone to notice it.

That is the source of the psychological risk: as drivers they fear they are impostors, not truly competent—and worse yet, they fear that you or their friends will find out. Students understand that during Tire Rack Street Survival®, their every move will be watched critically; most will want desperately to perform well.

The “test” environment is perceived as stressful and challenging, as you can certainly imagine. One of your first priorities will be to make the Tire Rack Street Survival® experience psychologically safe and fun.

Be Non-judgmental

By your language, your choice of words, and your air of calm, you communicate safety. Coolly convey *observations rather than negative assessments*. Be encouraging, by offering non-judgmental feedback. (Practical examples can be found in the Appendix.)

Your objectivity will model for the teen student how to embrace the learning process with its inevitable trials and errors. Mistakes are not failures. Nobody was born knowing it all. Together you and your student are experimenting and learning from the observations you make. When your student discovers you to be caring and a calm, honest observer, he will begin to open himself to coaching. The potential for enjoyment begins the moment the student becomes receptive to your coaching.

Reducing a Teen's Risk of Accidents

As children move toward adulthood there is always a debate about what is appropriate to a child's level of maturity. By law and tradition the absolute end point of childhood is the 21st birthday. However, in many matters we confer serious adult responsibility years earlier: military service, voting, certain contracts, employment law, criminal prosecution, sexual consent, and driving.

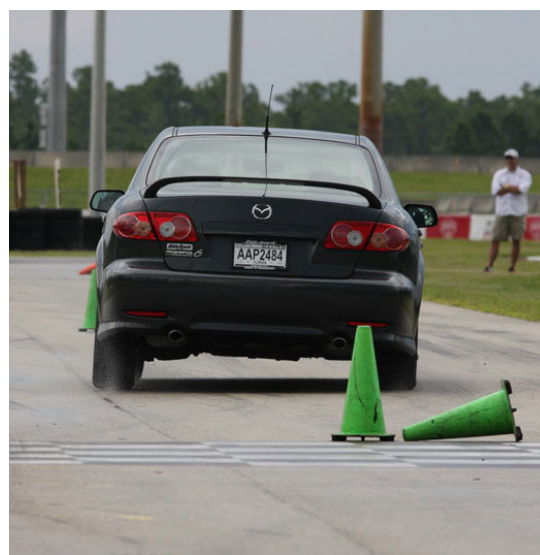


Photo: Jon van Woerden

Fostering Good Judgment

Teens have achieved 95% of their neurological development and have learned most of what they need to be independent adults. Capability is there, skills are developing rapidly, but judgment comes from experience. Though we never mention it to students in our Tire Rack Street Survival® courses, the accident avoidance skills we teach are basic to race driving as well as accident avoidance. Are we fostering risky behavior? At any age perceived risk gives rise to caution. By teaching these accident avoidance skills do we embolden students by giving them a false sense of security behind the wheel?

The limited statistics available say, “No.” Teens who attend our program are much less likely to be injured in traffic accidents, and less likely to get traffic tickets as untrained peers. Critics assert that the numbers are inherently biased; they argue that those who self-select to attend Tire Rack Street Survival® are already showing their commitment to prudent driving. This may be so. But in other areas of high-risk teen behavior, such as unprotected sex, the statistics suggest that educating teens helps them reduce risky choices. It should be obvious that ignorance and naivety, or as kids would say, *being clueless*, doesn't foster effective thinking. Knowledge creates a foundation for exercising good judgment or safety in any activity.

The whole context of our program is based on safety, and we scrupulously avoid introducing the language of competition, racing, or even high-performance driving into the training. Knowledge and skill-building offer teens better odds of escaping incidents by recognizing what the limits are and knowing how to avoid exceeding them. In the normal progression of the course, students will quickly discover that the car simply will not respond in certain circumstances. The car cannot defy the laws of physics no matter how skillfully the student drives.



We can't overstress this point. **In your role as coach, you must always assume an attitude of prudence and safety, and avoid behavior and language that might make the course seem dare-devil or competitive.**

You were probably selected as a coach because of your experience in racing or high performance driving events. The jargon of motor sports may well be a natural part of your vocabulary. So it may be challenging for you to speak about the exercises without using motor sport (think 'competitive') language. Here are some terms to carefully avoid: apex, track-out, turn-in, racing line, trail brake. If you are explaining something, use street driving examples, not track examples. (Examples of Tire Rack Street Survival® coaching vocabulary are offered in the Appendix.)

Do not tell "war stories" about your personal adventures at the race track. Some reference to the fact that you are experienced and trained in the skills you are coaching is inevitable, but it's prudent to deflect questions that move toward motorsports activities and keep the focus on learning safety skills. Coaches should not discuss high performance driver schools or racing activities with teen drivers.

Instead, talk about the common hazards of highway driving, stressing how safe driving requires vigilance and skills. When we are out on the road, other drivers may be having an argument, dialing a cell phone, texting, eating, tuning the radio, and a host of other distracting activities that put us all at risk. We can't really know or see what's going on with these other drivers, so it's easy to be caught unaware. Add in drivers who are impaired by alcohol or drugs, and it's easy to see that danger is ever present. Snow, rain, and poor visibility also create less than ideal driving conditions. In adverse conditions, knowledge of the limits of the car is critical. That, of course, is why avoidance skills are so important. You may not need them often, but they need to be in your pocket, so to speak.

Securing a Margin of Safety

Speak about creating 'a broad margin of safety' to compensate for inherent public highway risks. In normal driving our speeds leave at least half of the capabilities of the car untapped and available for the unexpected emergency – but only if we keep those performance capabilities in reserve. The yellow diamond-shaped curve signs, for example, suggest speeds about half the speed that the laws of physics allow under ideal conditions. They are structured conservatively for a number of reasons. Trucks, sedans, and sports cars all have different limits of performance. Visibility is reduced by curves in the road so moving traffic requires an added margin of safety to accommodate the unexpected animal, slippery patch, pothole, stopped garbage truck, school bus, pedestrian, bike rider ... whatever might be obscured around a curve. There are thousands of things that make it essential to have a sufficient margin of safety. Avoidance skills expand that margin by making all the capabilities of the car available to the driver.

It's dangerous out there in street traffic and even very good drivers need every break they can get. Everyone makes mistakes, gets distracted, has a bad day, and makes poor choices. So, in chatting with your teen student, make the point that Tire Rack Street Survival® skills won't help anyone avoid accidents or tickets if the skills are used to drive the car *at the limit* on the public streets. Doing so completely eliminates the margin of safety, leaving everyone vulnerable. It's not an exaggeration to say that survival is a matter of creating a safety margin big enough to allow

ourselves—teen or adult—to recover from the human errors that are inevitable on the street. Having made this point, you can point out that the Tire Rack Street Survival® course is an ideal controlled environment with no onrushing traffic and only soft rubber cones as a flexible barrier. Here one can safely explore the limits, experiment, make errors, and learn with minimal risk.

Don't raise the subject of doing this kind of "at the limit" driving as recreation, but if your student asks directly about motor sport activities, simply say that there will be information available at the end of the day for those interested.



How Students Learn

No matter how many books you read or lectures you attend, there are some things that can only be learned by doing. Riding a bike is one of them, and skillful driving is another. The Tire Rack Street Survival® program creates an ideal environment for active learning.

The classroom sessions present the guiding concepts that help a student get off to a good start. But knowing what to do – and actually doing it – are different matters as all of us well know.

At first students think they already have it down pretty well.

But they are not yet able to distinguish the difference between simply knowing the mechanics of piloting a car, and internalizing the feel of the controls at the limits of braking and turning. That takes 'seat time.'

It will be helpful if you have some empathy for what your students are confronting. Just when they thought they had driving nailed, they have to become beginners again. It's a big adjustment that even adult students sometimes find difficult.

The very act of waiting in line to do the exercises may be challenging. After the first student drives through the slalom course, all those about to follow will be wondering how they'll compare. When they actually take their turns, it's likely that they'll feel they were slower or more awkward than the other drivers. It looks different from behind the wheel.

With your support and encouragement, these initial anxious feelings and the inevitable humbling experiences will give way to a sense of fun and challenge. It will help if you keep in mind how the learning process works for all of us.

Practice that will develop skills is a four-part model:

- we start with a *concept*;
- based on taking *action*;
- then we *observe* the result; and finally,
- we *correct* the concept, and try again.

Both you and the classroom instructor will teach the concepts needed. As a coach you direct the application of the concepts and use your experience to *guide action*, *inform observation*, and *suggest correction*.

Let's say your student over-accelerates and turns late in the slalom. You might say something such as, "Next time try going a bit slower and turning the car sooner." The next time the student does better and the moves become more familiar. You congratulate her and maybe you suggest some refinements to smooth out some of the jerkiness. The third attempt will most likely be easier, and success evokes enjoyment. Your encouragement and coaching have facilitated the learning process so that your student experiences success quickly. Like as not, this will continue through the day.

The Coach: a Consciously Competent Observer

In the opening words of this booklet, we affirmed that you already know most of what you need to teach effectively – you are already competent. While that is certainly true, many coaches experience some frustration expressing themselves quickly and effectively in the heat of the moment. What you know is largely automatic and nothing you need to think about – you’re *unconsciously competent*. To instruct effectively, you need to bring back to conscious awareness *how* you are able to do what you do so well. Only when you are *consciously competent* can you coach with ease and clarity.

It starts with the basics. Adjust the seat properly, position your hands properly, and use your feet correctly. You do all those things automatically, but as a coach you need to be conscious of how the student is preparing herself to drive.

Challenges increase as the student is driving and performing the exercises. Of course, you need to keep your eyes ahead and anticipate what moves the student must make. But as you sense speed and the timing of turning and braking, you must also be ready to correct verbally.

As there is hardly time to utter a single word (and certainly no time to give lengthy instructions), *economy of words will be crucial to success*. In the following paragraphs we’ll consider the flow of a single exercise to illustrate several principles you can apply to coaching. But first let’s describe the core coaching concepts.



Rehearse Your Student As You Explain

In the minutes before your student takes his turn, explain the exercise in terms that clearly convey the concept. Keep in mind that you can say all the right words and still not know if you are understood by the student. So, ask your student to restate what you’ve said.

As you explain, weave in key commands that you may use in the exercise (brake, brake *hard*, turn, turn *more*, gas, *more* gas). The actual rehearsing of those commands before an exercise reduces the time the student takes to process your words and will make a huge difference in the degree of success of the exercise. With the car at rest and in park, instruct the student to press the brake pedal when you say “brake” and move the steering wheel when you say “turn more.”

Here is a sample dialog illustrating how a coach might handle the preparation for the braking exercise:

Coach: “Okay, Lee, in this exercise you’re going to practice straight-line braking to see how quickly you can bring the car to a full stop. You will accelerate to about 40. When you reach the cones that are lying down—the pointer cones—slam on the brakes and bring the car to a complete stop. This is an emergency stop, not a gradual one like you would do normally. Questions?”

Lee: “I don’t think so. I guess I understand.”

Coach: “So, just tell me in your own words what you will do when it’s our turn.”

Lee: “I’m just going to drive down to those cones and hit the brakes.”

Coach: “Right. You will glance at your speedometer and when you are even with the pointer cones you will slam on the brakes as hard as you can and hold them until the car completely stops.”

Lee: “Dad will kill me!”

Coach: “No he won’t. You have his permission.”

Lee: “Cool.”

Coach: “Since I’ll be in the car with you, I can help. Just as you get to the pointer cones, I’ll say, ‘Ready, brake now!’ When I say the word ‘now,’ you should be slamming the brake pedal down as hard as you can. The pedal will vibrate – that’s the feel of the anti-lock brakes.”

Lee: “Okay.”

Notice that the coach tells Tim the exact command he will use and what to do when he says it. This reduces Tim’s mental processing delay, so that his reactions will be prompt.

After observing that first brake exercise run, the coach will assess whether the student should do something different during the next run. If the ABS (anti-lock braking system) did not pulse, on the next run he might encourage the student to step much harder on the brake. It’s this sort of observation and feedback that makes the practice efficient and satisfying.

Prepare the Parents of Students

Your student’s parents may actually be at the event. Coaches should make an effort to meet parents and to thank them for making it possible for their child to participate. Explain the purpose and goals of the day. You can answer their questions and also ask them to support their child by staying in the background during the exercises. “Hovering” parents probably won’t be a positive influence. Your demeanor and professionalism will be more important than your words in communicating that their child and their car are in capable hands.



Photo: Jon van Woerden

Parents are often the ones who persuaded the teen to attend the event. Even so, they may not actually know very much about the exercises or what their teen will be learning. Be sure they understand that the extreme braking, the squealing tires, and the skids are a normal part of learning the limits of the automobile.

The Exercises

A detailed description of the various exercises is presented in the *Tire Rack Street Survival® Coach’s Guide*, a separate publication. There you will find diagrams of the layout, and a discussion of the planning, objectives, and procedures used to conduct each element of the program. The constraints of the local site and the available volunteer staff may require changing specific details, but this booklet and the Coach’s Guide will prepare you well for your day with students.

Student Personalities

As a coach you will want to understand your student and adapt your style accordingly. Personality types span the range from aggressive and overconfident to shy and fearful. With the former it may be a challenge to assert and maintain command; with the latter the challenge will be to get the student to drive hard enough to benefit from the course.

When you first meet the student and engage her in what seems to be small talk, you are making your assessment. By listening to the reaction to your questions and the affect displayed as the student responds, you can learn a great deal.

The Loose Cannon

At the overconfident end to the spectrum we describe the person as a “loose cannon.” This student may seek to impress you or may simply be disdainful of your role as a coach. Here’s a partial list of characteristics to listen for. The student:

- Talks a lot
- Doesn’t listen
- Distracts others
- Wants to do it his or her own way

- Or is:
- Boastful
- Skeptical of coach’s qualifications
- Impatient
- Loud

- Or has:
- Little respect for authority
- A tendency to interrupt, or
- A wandering gaze and attention



The challenge here is to establish your authority while instilling an openness to your coaching. Experience has shown that this is a two-step process. First you must establish control. This may be simply reminding the student that she must follow your instructions. In extreme instances, it may require dramatic action that interrupts the unacceptable behavior by telling the driver to park the car out of the line for the exercise and step out for a talk.

Here is a sample dialog.

Coach: “Pull out of line. We need to talk.”

Student: “What? I don’t want to miss my turn. Can’t you talk to me here while we’re waiting?”

Coach: “No. Pull out of line and give me your full attention.”

Student: “Oh, all right.” [Pulls the car roughly out of line. Coach opens the door...] “Hey, where’re you going? I thought you wanted to tell me something.”

Coach: “Let’s get out of the car. Come around to my side.” [Coach exits car.]

Student: “Okay, so what’s the big deal?”

Coach: “Tommy, I get the feeling you aren’t really into what we’re doing here. You seem to be committed to do this without any coaching. Would you rather not be doing these exercises?”

Student: “My dad says I’ve got to do this. I already know how to drive—got my license on the first try. None of my friends had to do more school to get the car. Why me?”

Coach: “I’m not here to make you do anything. You’re free to quit now. You’ll have to decide. If you’re lucky, you’ll never need to be good at this stuff, but I’ve saved myself from serious accidents more than once because I learned how to do this. It’s your choice—are you staying or leaving?”

Student: “I guess I’ll stay, my dad would kill me if I quit.”

Coach: “No point is staying if you don’t get anything out of it for yourself. Let’s make a deal. You promise me you’ll do your best to follow my coaching. I’ll do my best to have it be fun for both of us. Deal?”

Student: “Let’s get back in line.”

Coach: “Do we have a deal, or not?”

Student: “Deal.”

In the preceding conversation, the coach, by pulling the car out of line and getting the driver on his feet, established that he was in command and aware of the testing behavior. By getting a clear agreement on how they would relate, he established the limits needed in the situation. Notice that his confrontation was respectful of Tommy’s autonomy. He had no need for Tommy to submit to his authority, no need for Tommy to like him. He simply stated the alternatives, let Tommy choose, and respected his choice.

Once you have the student’s full attention, you explain the *contract* you require to allow him to continue with the Tire Rack Street Survival® exercises. You explain that while he drives and controls the car, you are in command. You will direct how the exercises are to be done, and he must do his best to follow those directions. Before going back to the exercises, get an explicit agreement. You want to hear words such as, “Deal,” and not an ambiguous, “I guess,” or “Yeah, yeah, so let’s go.”

The Shrinking Violet

The opposite is the shy, unsure or “Shrinking Violet” personality. This person may be so tentative and hesitant that it is difficult to get her up to the limits of performance the exercises require. Here’s a partial list of characteristics to listen and watch for. The student:

- Doesn’t say much
- Doesn’t respond readily to questions
- Hangs back and doesn’t mix
- Makes minimal eye contact

- Or is:
- Soft spoken
- Eager to please
- Excessively respectful or polite
- Very compliant
- Unenthusiastic
- Fearful
- Nervous



Photo: Jon van Woerden

The challenge here is to bolster confidence and encourage full participation. This person requires lots of reassurance. You will need to look for things to praise – you can start by congratulating her for showing up and being interested in driving well. You can applaud when she completes a run, creating a mood of fun and success.



It will also help if you reassure the student that you are an expert at knowing what cars can do and that you will be right there to help. Reaffirm that the course provides a safe environment to boldly push the envelope of driving skills. With your coaching, encourage her to relax and “go for it” on every exercise. Tell her to expect some real fun throughout the day.

With the shrinking violet, get a contract to *listen* and *trust you* and *have fun*.

Scene: *(Your student, Dana, has just begun the skid-pad exercise but is not getting the car up to the speed where it under-steers and she can experience the limits of control.)*

Coach: Okay Dana, squeeze the gas pedal so we gain more speed.

Dana: We might crash!

Coach: It'll be okay if the car skids. There's nothing to run into here, just rubber cones. (Dana gingerly accelerates, but is still way too slow.)

Dana: Dad's watching. If I spin he's gonna be mad.

Coach: He gave his permission. It's okay to slide the car here. It's a safe place to practice – that's how you'll learn to regain control. Trust me and follow my directions. Just keep squeezing the gas pedal and feel when the front wheels begin to slip.

Dana: This is scary.

Coach: You're doing fine. (The car begins to push, Dana abruptly turns the wheel more and lifts his foot off the gas; the car does a 180.)

Dana: Yikes!

Coach: Brakes!

Dana: Dad's smiling! I can't believe I'm doing this in his car.

Coach: Awesome! That was great. Now you know how it feels. Next, let's practice catching it before it spins.

The coach reassures the student and points out the safety of the controlled situation they're in. He gets Dana to make incremental increases in speed until the car plows and she makes the all-too-common mistake of turning and lifting. In the moments that follow, the coach will help Dana to analyze and understand why the spin happened and explain how she can catch a spin and prevent it. They will repeat the exercise practicing recovery skills, possibly using the hand brake to introduce a surprise element.

Play the Appropriate Role

These are examples of personality extremes. You will need to assess what you can project that will create the right environment for your student to learn. In this sense you are like an actor or sales professional. You bring forward those of your personal traits that produce the best relationship with each student for that day's purpose. You suppress those aspects of your personality that will not be helpful. This is a very pragmatic and practical matter: do what works.

If you aren't sure how it's going, ask. You may be surprised to hear that the student who isn't responding much is actually quite pleased. Ask something such as, "So how is this going for you so far?" Then follow up with, "How's my coaching, am I giving you too much, or not enough?"

Whatever is going on, ***be lavish in your appreciation***. Statements such as: "Good," "Well done," "You're doing great," will be most helpful and encouraging. Nobody ever got over-acknowledged. There is no such thing as too much applause.

To sum up, tailor how you present yourself to the student's personality and be respectful, appreciative, and honest in your feedback.

Practical Advice

We've discussed coaching Tire Rack Street Survival® in terms of general ideas and concepts. Though coaching styles differ, our most experienced and effective coaches use the tools we describe in the following "how-to" section.

Getting off to a good start

In most cases you will be paired with one or two students. With the first introduction, so begins the assessment of how best to relate to the student. Consider the time preceding the first exercise as an interview where you will determine the personality, attitude, and experience of the student.

- Before getting into the car, walk around it and ask questions.
- Continue the discussion as you get seated and await your turn for the first exercise.
- Your aim is to know the student before the exercise, and to arrive at a shared set of goals for the day's experience.



The following is an outline of topics to cover. Enclosed in parenthesis is the information for which you are listening.

DESIRED INFORMATION	QUESTIONS TO POSE
1 Greeting To discover if anyone is present (parents or friends) who might ‘affect’ behavior To discover if there is evidence of any physical or emotional issues	What school do you attend? What year are you in? Did anyone come with you today? How are you feeling today?
2 Walking Around the Car How familiar is the student with the car’s handling? Does the student prefer performance, luxury, ease, etc.? How much does the student understand about the mechanics of the car? Does the student know about these systems and why they are there?	Is this the car you drive the most? What car do you enjoy the most? Does the car have front or rear-wheel drive? Does this car have ABS? Traction Control?
3 In the Car How experienced is the student? What is the student’s attitude about learning?	When did you get your license? Who helped you to get ready for the test?
4 About the Exercises How clear are the student’s expectations?	What would you like to accomplish today?

Getting Ready

Once you are seated in the car, take a look at your student’s seating position. Ideally the seat should be positioned so that the pedals can be fully depressed without fully straightening the leg, or pointing the toe. The seat back and steering wheel position should be upright so that the student’s back is firmly supported and he or she can touch the top of the wheel with the wrist.

A “ghetto gangsta” posture is popular with some teens; they drive with a ball cap worn backwards, and the seat reclined as if to keep low to avoid drive-by shooters. It will prove impossible to do the exercises from such a position.

The seatbelt should be free of twists and snug over the hipbones. Make your suggested correction light-hearted by saying that you give “style points” for good position during the exercises.

Some students drive automatics with their left foot on the brake. This may be okay for champion go-cart drivers, but for most drivers it is a bad habit that will reduce gas mileage and eat up brake linings. Encourage your student to keep the left foot on the “dead pedal” or floorboard for added stability in the seat.

Doing Exercises

Explain that the purpose of the exercises is to learn through experience. Explain and rehearse the commands you may use. Reassure your student that the exercises are experiments designed to develop driving skills at or near the limits of a car’s handling. So it’s okay to do things that Mom or Dad would frown upon. Some exercises explore the limits of the brakes, others the limits of traction when turning at fast speeds. Certain terms will be used in the classroom and are listed in the Appendix so that you can review them with your student.

Conclusion

The skills that Tire Rack Street Survival® graduates acquire can be put to good or bad use – that depends on the attitude and judgment of the students. If they drive at lawful speeds and develop good highway situation awareness and defensive driving techniques it’s very possible that your students will be successful in avoiding accidents for the rest of their driving careers. Unfortunately, you can’t directly confer good attitude or judgment. You can only provide the knowledge and tools.

However, during the time spent intensely interacting with your students, you will have set an example. By the end of your day with students, you will have earned their respect. You may even become a role model they aspire to imitate. They will come away with a respect for the challenge of driving well, and they’ll go forward with knowledge of the limitations of their skills and their cars’ performance. Likely as not, they will be receptive to your suggestions about further training experiences. You should set an example for them though out the day, even when you are not with your student. Remember you are being seen by students and parents all the time.



**You will have given them the tools to avert a life-altering highway tragedy.
That’s a result well worth your time and commitment.**

**On behalf of everyone who contributed to the Tire Rack Street Survival® program
I thank you for volunteering in this important work.**



Photo: Jon van Woerden

Appendix

Useful Information and Tools for Coaches

Coaching Vocabulary

We suggested in the text that a coach should use a limited vocabulary of commands when the student is doing the exercises.

You want your meaning to be instantly understood, and you don't want to be searching for the right words as the vehicle hurtles forward. Here are some words and phrases that may be useful, especially if you have discussed what they mean before the exercises begin.

Imperatives

Brake
More Brake
Full Brake (Threshold or Full ABS pedal pressure)
Turn
Turn Now
Turn More (or less)
Unwind (the steering)
Easy (don't accelerate)
Go straight
Don't lift (foot off gas abruptly)
Slow down (less gas)
Slow down more (much less gas)
More gas
Feather (the gas)
Squeeze (the brake, the gas pedal)
Brush the brake
Be Smooth
Go (left, right, across, inside, outside)
Both feet in! (Depress both clutch and brake fully)
Keep driving the car
Look up (Eyes up)
Wait (don't turn yet, don't brake yet)*

Observations

Too Hot (too fast)
Too Slow
Too rough (transition)

Marks

Pointer cone (cones laid on sides to point direction)
Gate (cones arranged to make a gateway)



Photo: Jon van Woerden

Non-judgmental Observation

As coach, practice being a calm observer who reports what you see without adding negative characterizations, not even humorous ones. The language you and your student use is important in this regard. Negative words ('sloppy', 'screwed up') serve to make the task seem unpleasant and hard, while they contribute no useful information. Neutral words ('too wide' or 'too quick') clarify the concept without adding the burden of judgment or blame.

Develop the habit of establishing a professional and non-judgmental atmosphere. The teen student may make self-deprecating remarks to relieve tension. Explain that it is important not to say things that make it more difficult to perform well. Consider examples below to get a feel for how non-judgmental language might sound in your dialog with a student.

1 If a student is driving too fast and consequently making judgment errors...

Coach: "Slow up. Let's go for more accuracy and smoothness."

Avoid: "Slow down! Don't be such a lead foot."

2 Student says, "Sh**! That was awful."

Coach: "Don't beat up on yourself, we're here to discover the limits, and you just did."

Next time you'll do a little better."

Avoid: "You're right. You'll need to do better than that."

3 If a student is having problems braking sufficiently:

Coach: "Next time, see if you can make the ABS pulse the brake pedal. Press it as hard as you can."

Avoid: "That's all wrong; you're supposed to stand on the brakes. Don't be such a wimp."

4 If student doesn't maintain a steady pressure on the accelerator, causing the car to jerk along:

Coach: "Work on smooth, decisive driving. You'll have better control even when going fast."

Avoid: "Don't punch the gas! Can't you feel how it upsets your control?"

5 If the student doesn't take in "the big picture":

Coach: "Look ahead and anticipate the moves you need to make."

Avoid: "Pay attention! You're not looking far enough ahead."

6 If the student continues to berate himself: "Damn, I blew it again!"

Coach: "This stuff isn't that easy. Stay cool and you'll get it."

Avoid: "Keep this up and you'll never learn to drive."

Setting the Stage: In the intervals between runs, you can suggest the behavior you would like the student to exhibit. On the slalom, for example, you might say, "Try a little gas and swing wider of the inside cone so your rear tires miss it."

Other Driver Schools

Parents may want to receive the training similar to what their kids get with Tire Rack Street Survival® and the teens themselves may want more highway safety and car control training. Here are some programs available to drivers of all ages:

Defensive Driving

Unlike Tire Rack Street Survival® which produces and delivers a hands-on accident avoidance skills course, the National Safety Council [(800) 621-7619, (www.NSC.com)] sponsors and certifies traffic safety lecture courses that teach highway situational awareness and driving best practices to help drivers avoid situations that lead to accidents. These courses have the added benefit of earning graduates a reduced insurance premium from many auto insurers. We highly recommend such driving courses for every driver. Several for-profit schools such as NTSI offer on-line traffic safety courses (http://ntsi.com/traffic_school/) and provide similar instruction.

Car Control Practice

Most of the nation's motor sport venues host an advanced driving school. Parents who wish to learn what their kids learn at Tire Rack Street Survival® should seek out a local track and inquire. Several nationally prominent offerings follow:

- Skip Barber (various tracks), www.skipbarber.com
- BSR Inc. (Summit Point, WV), www.bsr-inc.com
- Mid Ohio (Lexington, OH), www.midohio.com/school
- Sports Car Club of America (Nationwide Locations), www.SCCA.org
- BMW Car Club of America (Nationwide Locations), www.BMWCCA.org

(Note: Availability of car control clinics, or skid pad training, varies with the BMW chapter.)

A web search for “high performance driving” or “racing schools” will yield a more complete list encompassing both for-profit and non-profit enterprises. Offerings specific to accident avoidance vary with the individual school and track.

Autocross

The BMW CCA, SCCA, and other sports car club chapters offer autocross events that afford a controlled environment to develop the skills introduced in Tire Rack Street Survival®. These events are fun for parents and teens. Search the web for local chapter listings and contact information.

Track Driving Events

Track Driver Schools will not be available to most teens because of insurance age constraints and the cost of preparing a vehicle. Coaches should not suggest driver schools or racing activities to teen drivers. However, go cart tracks in many locations offer an exciting and safe driving experience for youthful drivers. Many of the skills from go cart driving transfer to larger vehicles, and the go cart may offer a suitable outlet for teens who are serious about auto sports.



Photos: Jon van Woerden



It's about more than driving - it's about LIVING!

www.streetsurvival.org