



# Distractions: In and Out of the Vehicle

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Distractions affect a driver's ability to safely perform the driving task. Evidence shows that drivers whose attention is diverted away from the driving task for more than 2 seconds at a time are at increased risk of a crash. Drivers need to focus their full attention on the driving task. While all drivers can be distracted, young drivers are at greatest risk.

## **Nature of the distracted-driving traffic crash problem for young drivers:**

The reasons for the over-involvement of drivers under age 20 in distracted driving include:

- Driving with peers in the car;
- Use of electronic devices; and
- Lack of familiarity with particular vehicles.

While any driving distraction has the potential to cause a driver to experience a crash, several specific distractions have been identified as particularly hazardous to young drivers (under 20), including in-vehicle distractions and distractions outside of the vehicle:

### **Potential In-Vehicle Distractions**

- Interactive communication devices, cell phones, pagers and navigation systems
- Grooming
- Adjusting the radio system—changing the channel, changing CDs
- Occupants—infants, children, teenagers, adults
- Eating and drinking
- Adjusting vehicle controls—heat/air conditioning, tilt of steering wheel, mirrors, seat position, dash light brightness
- Reading
- Smoking
- Pets that are not contained
- Reaching for objects

### **Distractions Occurring Outside the Vehicle:**

- Crash scene
- Road construction
- People, places, or things of interest alongside the road

## **The following is a list of potential consequences of driving while distracted.**

- Inability to avoid collision with stopped vehicles
- Not maintaining proper lane position
- Inability to make quick decisions
- Reduced situational awareness
- Inability to execute emergency maneuvers
- Inability to recognize and obey traffic signals and signs



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By giving advanced thought toward addressing in-vehicle distractions, drivers can maintain focus on the driving task.

There are things you can do to keep from getting distracted while driving:

- Do not text or use cell phones. If you need to use your cell phone, stop in a safe parking area.
- Avoid arguments or distracting conversations with passengers.
- Instead of eating while driving, leave a little early to allow yourself time to stop to eat.
- Be sure children are properly and safely buckled up and give them books, toys or games to occupy their time.
- Properly secure pets in a pet carrier or portable kennel before moving your vehicle.
- Adjust vehicle controls, such as mirrors, heat or air conditioning, before you begin your trip. Take advantage of normal stops to adjust controls or ask your passenger to adjust controls.
- Review maps and plan your route before you begin driving. If you need to look at a map stop in a safe parking area.
- Do not talk with occupants of other vehicles.
- Do not wear headphones to listen to music.
- Stay focused, pay attention, and expect the unexpected.

## **In Summary:**

- Young drivers are especially susceptible to distraction while driving, and the consequences can be deadly.
- Texting and cell phone use while driving are especially dangerous.
- With some forethought and pre-drive planning, drivers can prevent many potential distractions, such as map-reading or adjusting vehicle heater or air conditioning, from taking place while driving.
- The potential for drivers to become distracted is expected only to increase over time with advances in communication and entertainment devices.
- If you are driving with friends or family in the car, you are responsible for their safety. Don't get so engaged in talking that you lose your concentration on the road. Your distraction could seriously injure or kill others.