

Wheel / Parents need to be involved

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school year, driving school is an increasingly popular option, Brian Nowak said.

"What we do with the kids is different than what Mom and Dad do," said Nowak, who provides training for about 200 students per year. "Kids grow up with Mom and Dad and think Mom and Dad don't know anything.

"Parents need to be involved with kids in their driving, but I think it's important for kids to go through a driver's ed course. For a student to get a restricted license, they have to take a driver's ed course. I think that's really good. Whether it's through us or someone else, I just think it's important they get that experience."

Kay Peppiatt decided driving school would be a good way for her 15-year-old daughter, Alyssa, to learn how to drive.

"We thought maybe that was a better way to teach them," Kay Peppiatt said. "Our older one had gone through driver's ed through the school and did very well, but it just didn't work out with Alyssa's schedule for the summer."

Peppiatt allowed her daughter to get an instructional permit when she turned 14 so she could begin to get some practice in.

"We've been taking her out and slowing getting her into driving," she said. "We took her up to the (First Covenant Church) parking lot and let her drive around where there's no vehicles."

The key is getting the kids experience, Peppiatt said.

"The best thing we can do for kids is have them drive with us as much as possible," she said. "They've got to go out on their own at some time anyway, so get them as much experience as possible."

That sentiment was echoed by Shawn Halpain, whose 14-year-old daughter, Rachelle, has recently begun practicing behind the wheel.

"We feel that before she gets her license — whether it be at 16 or 17 — that the more experience she has, the better driver she'll be," Halpain said.

Kansas law allows 15-year-olds to obtain restricted licenses — meaning they can drive without supervision to school or work — and 16-year-olds to get a license outright. But that doesn't mean parents should be in a rush to get their kids licenses at those ages, Halpain said.

"I really think that's awfully young," she said. "I really think it depends on



RODRICK REIDSMA / Salina Journal

Salina South High School sophomore Alyssa Peppiatt (left), 15, checks traffic as she gets some driving practice in with her mother, Kay. The Kansas Department of Transportation allows 15-year-olds to have a restricted driver's license.

the kids' driving experience. If it was bumped up to 17, I'd be more comfortable with that."

Statistics compiled by the Kansas Department of Transportation indicate that teen drivers account for 6.7 percent of all Kansas registered drivers but 20.1 percent of all crashes — and 13 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes are teen drivers.

It's important for parents to make sure their children are abiding by any restrictions their license carries, said Lt. Russ Lamer, head of the Salina Police Department's traffic bureau. He said they also should be aware of issues that can affect driving performance.

"Restrict the number of passengers," Lamer said, "because for every extra passenger that's in a car, it increases the risk of a traffic crash by two."

Before a young driver even sees a city street, there should be plenty of practice time, Heaton said.

She said her daughter Tara "way exceeded" the 50 hours of supervised driving required to get a license.

"After we got to a certain point in the book, we would go up to the old airport by Markley Road, because it was a nice, open place," Heaton said. "We just practiced starts and stops and reversing, that type of thing. They need a lot of practice before they even get on the road."

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