

Making ADHD teens better drivers

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A University at Buffalo researcher's work with a state-of-the-art driving simulator is making better drivers among those considered to be the most risky motorists on the road: teens with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

Gregory A. Fabiano, UB associate professor of counseling, school and educational psychology, has already established a therapeutic program that not only helps these [teens](#) become better [drivers](#) but also builds better relationship with their parents.

Now, thanks to a \$2.8 million grant from the National Institute of Health's National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Fabiano will extend his already successful program to other teens and their families, therapy that includes dramatic demonstrations of the unforgiving and often dramatic dangers of texting while [driving](#).

"We had worked with children with ADHD for a long time at the university," says Fabiano, a recipient of the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, the nation's highest honor for professionals at the early stages of their independent scientific research careers. "And as those kids grew up, we heard concerns from parents about the transition to independent driving.

"So we did some research and found out results not surprising to anybody. Teen drivers are the worst on the road. And some recent research has shown that compared to that worst group of drivers, teen drivers with ADHD were significantly more at risk for everything."

Fabiano's grant-funded project -- a joint effort between a Graduate School of Education research team and UB's New York State Center for Engineering Design and Industrial Innovation -- also has found stark results when it comes to teens texting while driving: Texting while driving can make individuals as bad as drunk drivers or worse.

"It's hard to turn on the TV or open a newspaper or magazine without seeing something about the risks of texting and driving," Fabiano says. "Because cell phones only have been around for a while, this is a recent phenomenon. And only in the past five years have text messages and texting been something we all have on our phones and in our pocket, so it's really a new distracter that teens now entering the roadway are having.

"In our research, we have yet to have somebody be a successful texter while driving, and that includes our internal staff and me," Fabiano explains. "Texting while driving impairs driving to the extent where there are deviations in the lane, on the shoulder, people spinning out, they lose control, and it's not hard to extrapolate that if that sort of thing happened on a real road, you could have hit a pedestrian, another car, a bad accident."

Fabiano says the significant conclusion of this part of his research is how the teenagers who lose control of the simulated vehicle while texting often do not realize their ability to drive was severely compromised.

"We have found teens with ADHD are like children with ADHD in that they have poor insight on the impact of their behavior on others," Fabiano says. "So most of the teens we work with think they can easily text while driving without any poor consequences."

Fabiano's five-year NIH study began in April. It focuses on ADHD teenage drivers with learner's permits. The teens practice on the driving

simulator and are given an onboard driving monitor to track driving behaviors, giving parents and teens the chance to review their driving performance and interactions.

The goal of the study is develop a driver education program targeted to ADHD teens and their parents.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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