StreetReady: Simulation Training for Inexperienced Drivers



by Mark Katz, PhD

Parents, educators, health-care providers and well-informed consumers are finding creative ways to address the needs and daily challenges of those who struggle with AD/HD. In each issue of Attention, *we highlight one innovative program, model, or practice and pass on appropriate contacts so you can implement similar efforts in your community. Appearance in this column, however, does not imply endorsement by CHADD.*

EXPERIENCED DRIVERS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO NEAR MISSES. New drivers are not. This raises a very important question: How can we better prepare new drivers to handle unexpected dangers without exposing them and others to actual danger? Simulation training may be an answer. And according to some experts in the field, one of the most comprehensive driver simulation training programs commercially available is StreetReady. This program is especially good news for new drivers with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), who are at even greater risk of accidents than inexperienced drivers in general.

The StreetReady program exposes young drivers to dangerous driving situations—the near misses—then provides them opportunities to practice ways to safely negotiate around them, all within the safe confines of a 180-degree virtual reality driving simulator. Students progress through twelve 20-minute lessons. Each lesson must be successfully mastered before moving on to the next. Nearly every move behind the wheel is monitored, from fastening the seatbelt to looking left and right when approaching an intersection. Over 80 attributes are monitored in all, close to 30 times per second. Results are summarized in report form on an ongoing basis for students to see. The program also offers up to 70 lessons for students needing more intensive practice.

The StreetReady curriculum was developed in association with the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA, http://adtsea.iup.edu/adtsea), the professional association for traffic safety educators. The curriculum also incorporates lessons commonly found in non-simulation programs—such as separation distances, collision avoidance, risk avoidance, and the dangers of driving while impaired by drugs or alcohol.

StreetReady's twelve basic lessons include:

› **Getting Ready to Drive.** Students learn about vehicle components and also take a pre-test of driving skills.

› **Developing Visual Processes.** Students learn about blind zones.

› **Developing Searching Skills.** Students practice using their visual skills to gather important information to help deal with potential problems.

› **Searching for Signs, Signals and Markings.** Students practice paying attention to the road and to signs, signals, and pavement markings on and around the roadway.

› **Evaluating to Minimize Risk.** Students are assessed on how they respond to road hazards and other driving dangers, as well as to their vehicle's travel path or sight line.

› **Executing Effective Speed and Position Adjustments.** Students practice using their brakes and accelerator for speed adjustments, lane adjustments or lane changes.

› **Managing Intersections.** Students practice how to safely approach, enter and exit an intersection.

› **Managing Turns at Intersections.** Students practice how to safely make left and right turns at different types of intersections.

› **Managing Curves and Hills.** Students practice ways to handle curves, hills or grades that restrict road visibility ahead.

› **Managing Time and Space Intervals.** Students learn how to execute appropriate skills in complex driving situations, including those involving higher speeds, more traffic flow, unusual intersections or approaching hills or curves.

› **Responding to Vehicle Failure.** Students practice ways to handle common vehicle malfunctions.

› **Assessing Driver Performance and Awareness.** Students are assessed on the skills learned in previous lessons, including their ability to evaluate driving situations and execute reduced-risk choices within the available time and space using appropriate communication, speed adjustment and lane position adjustments.

To successfully progress through the lessons students must master road dangers under varying environmental conditions—when it's raining, snowing or foggy, for example, and when driving

at night or at dusk. Students who make mistakes handling specific simulated road hazards have opportunities for repeated practice until skills improve. New drivers learn how to handle real-world driving dangers without the danger. Says Bob Davis, CEO of Virtual Driver Interactive, the California based company that created the program, "Let them have their first accident with us."

After successfully completing StreetReady, new drivers are also encouraged to enroll in the company's Virtual Defensive Driving Course (VDDC), designed by the National Safety Council (NSC). According to Davis, the course combines the NSC's proven Defensive Driving Course curriculum, which includes lessons in separation distance, collision avoidance and the dangers of driving under the influence, with practice behind the wheel of a virtual reality driving simulator. After successfully completing the course, new drivers are issued a certificate from the NSC.

Research shows that new drivers, in relation to experienced drivers, are at significantly greater risk of accidents and traffic violations. And new drivers with AD/HD are at greater risk than new drivers who do not have the disorder. Graduated driving programs can help. But how can we also provide new drivers with AD/HD the practice they need in handling the many unexpected dangers we all encounter behind the wheel?

Virtual simulation programs like StreetReady may be one answer. While the cost of Virtual Driver Interactive's top-of-the line driving simulator will be well beyond what the majority of families can afford, the company offers various leasing arrangements to schools, a popular option for high schools needing several simulators to address their diverse training needs.

Those interested in learning more about StreetReady can do so by logging on to their Web site, www.driverinteractive.com. Additional resources dedicated to improving teen driving safety include the Safe Teen Driving Club (www.safeteendrivingclub.org) and the Joshua Brown Foundation (www.joshuabrown.org). The Safe Teen Driving Club provides an array of programs, services, articles and products designed to improve teen driving safety. One product is a global positioning device capable of monitoring driving performance from a home computer in real time. The Joshua Brown Foundation is dedicated to making the most technologically available driver education training programs available to all teens.

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