

Driver Education – On-Line vs. Classroom

“I am the author of "Joshua's Law" and more importantly Joshua's father. When I wrote the bill and worked to get it passed, I had never even thought of an on-line curriculum. Now that it is here, I am not happy about it“

Alan Brown, Chairman of the Joshua Brown Foundation, (used by permission).

As the owner of the Towne Lake Driving School, I receive inquiries on a daily basis about driver education and training courses, mostly in the effort to fulfill “Joshua’s Law” (Senate Bill 226) requirements that mandate teen driver education by licensed and approved schools. I often hear parents lament that their son/daughter just has so many conflicts and activities that they can’t possibly attend a classroom course of 30 hours as is required by “Joshua’s Law”, and perhaps on-line classroom training is better suited for them.

Nearly 5000 teens die each year from automobile crashes, and this is by-far the leading cause of death among teenagers. It’s a National epidemic that the State has addressed in the goal of saving lives. This statistic doesn’t even address the thousands of teen drivers and passengers that are injured, as well as the millions of dollars of property damage that occurs with all the teen driving collisions. This is a serious topic, and one that deserves every parent’s full attention to prevent their teen from suffering this national tragedy. Every parent needs to investigate if on-line driver training is effective and make appropriate decisions that aren’t merely based in convenience.

As an educator of more than 3 decades, and having been the President of two Colleges that provided hundreds of courses (both classroom and on-line) to thousands of students, I know the value and efficiency of many on-line courses and programs. But since there is a real epidemic of teen driver tragedy, we need to answer if on-line programs are the best method to educate our young people in driving. Let’s look at 4 On-Line Driver training myths.

Myth #1 – On-line training is the same as classroom training since the State has approved both.

It’s true that the State of Georgia Department of Driver Services reviews curriculum, instructors, facilities, and training automobiles prior to approval. But that in no way means that all training methods are equal. Simply put, governmental approval does not mean that all training methods have the same outcomes. We educators look at outcomes of the process to measure effectiveness. I offer behind-the-wheel training to those students who have already taken on-line classes, and the outcomes usually show that these students know far less than our classroom students. The outcomes are not the same, and on-line training raises the risk factor to teen drivers when compared with classroom training.

Myth #2 - On-line training is less expensive.

You will save about \$50 on average by using on-line training instead of classroom training. But the question is whether the poorer outcomes and higher risk to your teen are worth \$50. I've been invited on multiple occasions to offer on-line driver training, and always refused. I know that classroom training is far more effective, far more enjoyable and produces better outcomes, and in my opinion \$50 is a small price for a greater chance at driving proficiency and safety.

Myth #3 – On-line training is faster, self-paced, and can be completed at any time.

Asynchronous on-line programs can be accessed at any time – even 2:00 a.m. if you desire. But will your teen have the discipline and determination to maintain a self-pace? Will they opt to use that Sunday afternoon football time to study on-line? My experience in surveying students has been that on-line training takes much longer to actually complete, is far less interesting, and requires significant self-discipline. Students have told me; “It was awful, I couldn't wait to get through it.” “It took me 5 ½ months to complete.” “I wish I'd come to class with my friends.”

Myth #4 – On-line training is more convenient than classroom training.

Teen agers have multitudes of activities that keep all of them extremely busy. There will always be conflicts with classes, and this sometimes makes students lean towards on-line training, assuming it will be convenient. But the facts are that 30 hours are required for both classroom and on-line to fulfill Joshua's Law. And although it may require some sacrifice of activities in the short-run, the better outcomes and greater enjoyment on the part of the student of classroom training is worth the sacrifice. After all which is more important to you – temporarily interrupting a sport or activity, or enduring a higher risk of death or injury for your teen.

After reviewing these “Myths” about on-line training, I urge you to select carefully when helping your teen driver fulfill the required training. Look for professional educators that are committed to education, not just to business. Look for instructors who really care about teen safety, and actually like educating teens. Look for up-to-date curriculum and corollary materials to aid in training. Choose wisely, as your teen's life may depend on it.



Dean R. Brownhill, M. Ed.
Towne Lake Driving School
1105 Parkside Ln., Ste 1328
Woodstock, GA 30189
678-494-2200
www.TowneLakeDrivingSchool.com

