

In just one snap, it could all be gone. A single friend request, a “where are you?” text, or an unfavorable song could alter the lives of members of a community forever. Is it all worth it? As a teen in the 21st Century, I am accustomed to giving and receiving information constantly. In this day and age, young people are flooded with such a colossal stream of stimulus through their cell phones, that when cell phones are removed from the equation for a period of time, anxiety often occurs. We never grew out of the security blanket phase. On the contrary, they’ve just been remodeled to be 5 inch rectangles that can process a world of information at the tap of a button. Cell phones have been a fantastic addition to modern society and have changed the world as we all know it, but it is when drivers can’t keep their cell phones away that a massive problem occurs. The amount of teens injured by texting and driving has surpassed the amount of teens injured while drinking and driving. This is a major epidemic upon young people as a whole. Teens are not the sole wrongdoers when it comes to distracted driving. Approximately 49 percent of adults text and drive. That is more than the 43 percent of teens that admit to using their phones behind the wheel. Both of these numbers are on the rise. It appears that adults are involuntarily conditioning their children that these actions are okay. The “do as I say and not as I do” phrase has never been an effective parenting method for instilling any lesson into a child. Parents are raising the next innovators of the world. The loss of life among teens as a result of answering a text is wasteful and need a resolution sooner rather than later.

Situations where distracted driving is prevalent in teens’ lives are more common than ever. I vividly remember one situation in which I was riding around in the summer with a friend of mine. Living in a small town in West Virginia with not much to do on a weeknight, when we were bored, we’d often just cruise around in the warm evening breeze. This night was no different. We hopped in the car together and my friend immediately rolled every window down

and used her phone to turn on loud music. Although, I should have had an immediate reaction that this behavior was negative, I did not. This was absolutely nothing out of the ordinary. As we were driving along winding country roads, singing our own personal concert, I noticed my friend check her Snapchat and respond to a text. Again, this is nothing out of the ordinary and I hardly noticed she was not paying attention to the road in front of us. It wasn't until I took a break from looking at my own phone that I noticed we were practically in the other lane of traffic on a small winding road. Deer, four-wheeler riders, and other cars were not uncommon on this road. Going into a blind turn while almost being on the wrong side of the road was the wakeup call I needed. I immediately pointed out the fact that she was on the wrong side of the road and she forcefully corrected the car, all the while keeping one hand on her phone keyboard. This is when I decided something needed to be done. I kindly reminded her that she was the driver and that it was her job to make sure we were safe. I took her phone and informed her that I would gladly be her "receptionist" so to speak. It was now my job to adjust the windows, volume, songs, and to respond to her text messages. Her driving instantly improved and we had a great evening laughing and safely exploring beautiful scenic roads. My friend isn't a bad driver. She, in that moment, was just a distracted driver. She did not mean to put both of us in danger, but was just exhibiting the same behaviors as many teens and adults do in both of our lives.

In Conclusion, it does not take a horrible accident to wake a community up. Something needs to be done before another life is cut too short due to distracted driving. I believe that driving under the influence of electronics or DUIE should be regarded in the same esteem as the infamous DUI. Many who would drink and drive choose not to do so due to the fact they could get a DUI, not because of the damage they could inflict while being intoxicated behind the wheel. Although this logic is morally unsound, it works. The number of DUI related injuries in recent years have gone

down yet the number of DUIE injuries continue to climb. In both of these driving crimes, the motorist is impaired from safely making decisions and reacting quickly on the road. Distracted drivers often have their hands off the wheel, eyes off the road, and mind not on the task at hand. This makes them an equal threat to motorists as a driver who just spent their evening at the local bar. In my opinion, a solution to reducing the number of accidents caused by distracted driving would be to make the fines for DUIs and DUIEs equal and the possible jail time equal as well. In small towns, everyone knows everyone. Tragedies like distracted driving shatter an entire community. The time for change is now before it is too late.

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