

There are lots of ways to be distracted when driving, just not talking or texting. Most people think they are good drivers, and that they will not be involved in an accident. They do not realize that they are doing things behind the wheel that can cause them to be distracted. You can be distracted visually by looking at something other than the road. You can be distracted audially by allowing loud music or voices to distract you. You can be distracted manually when you are using your hands to work anything other than the steering wheeling.

Distracted driving is a problem for drivers of all ages. It is not something new to us. It has affected many generations before us. Distracted driving affected my Pawpaw when he was younger and had to read a road atlas while driving. Today, my Dad gets distracted using his GPS while driving. My Mawmaw was distracted as a young mom, when she had to reach into the back seat while driving to pick up a toy for her screaming son. Today, my Aunt gets distracted by reaching into the back seat to give my niece her cell phone so she can play a game. These examples show different generations of distracted driving.

I would consider most of my family and friends to be good drivers, but I have watched my Mom put on makeup while driving. I have watched my brother be distracted by his German Shepherd in the backseat while driving. I have watched my sister reach for her purse that fell off the seat while driving. I have watched my friends be distracted while driving with a car full of friends talking and laughing. I have watched teammates be distracted while driving with loud music. Luckily, none of my family and friends had accidents in these examples of distracted driving, but they certainly could have. This shows us that we all have been distracted while driving at some time in our lives. We just do not always recognize it. We texted while driving and did not have an accident, so it was okay this time. But what about next time?

My distracted driving incident happened on a beautiful warm spring evening. I had just played a high school softball game. We beat a big rival, and I hit a homerun over the centerfield fence! It was a great night. I took the T-tops off my jeep and headed into town to meet my teammates to celebrate at Roosters. We had the best night sitting there laughing and reminiscing about the game and how we worked together to get the victory. When I left to go home, I had my T-tops out, windows down and music turned up. I was on top of the world. I was driving through town taking the same route I always do. I stopped at a stop sign and proceeded to the next one. I stopped at the next one and started to go straight, and I heard a very loud horn and squealing tires. I looked up and a car's headlights were shining right in my face. The car was coming right at me. Luckily, I was able to accelerate quickly, and the other car slammed on its brakes. Somehow, we just missed colliding in the intersection. I pulled over to the curb and the guy in the car was screaming at me for running the red light. He called me all kinds of names, gave me some inappropriate hand gestures, and went on his way. I sat there staring straight ahead as my heart beat out of my chest. It was the scariest thing that has ever happened to me. When I replayed what had just happened in my head, I remember stopping at the first stop sign and then proceeded to the next one. I did stop. However, it was not a stop sign. It was a traffic light. I had pulled up to the traffic light, stopped, and proceeded straight through the red light. This was my normal route. I have driven this way hundreds of times, but that night I was distracted. I thought I stopped at a stop sign, but it was actually a red light. I had pulled right out in front of that car. Luckily for me, he was not distracted. He was able to blow his horn to get my attention, I was able to immediately accelerate, and he was able to slam on his brakes and come to a stop. I sat there for a few minutes to gather myself. The sound of the horn and squealing tires continued to replay in my head. I rolled up my windows and turned down my music and pulled back into the

street to head home. I had a death grip on my steering wheel, and I had my hands at the ten and two positions just like they taught us in drivers' education. I did not take my eyes off the road. That whole incident lasted for less than 10 seconds, but it seems like several minutes. I am not sure why God decided to spare me from having an accident that night, but I am glad he did. It scared me so bad, that it has left a lasting impression on me. I have told all my friends about that night, and I remind them when we are together to not distract the driver.

That night was a different kind of distracting driving. Yes, I had my music turned up, but my music was not the reason I mistook a stop sign for a red light. I was distracted because I was taking in the fresh air, listening to my music, and allowed my mind to wonder back to our big softball win. I was not focused on the road at all.

A good way to educate teens would be to have local law enforcement stage a distracted drivers mock crash at high schools and give statistics about the number of distracted driver crashes in our community. They could display other crash photos and have survivors of distracting driving crashes talk to students about what caused their accident.

A distracted driving commercial on television showing mangled cars and explaining why the driver was distracted would be a way to reach many households and people of all ages.

I believe these methods would have the ability to scare some people straight and could help save lives. We all need to realize that in a split second, we could ruin our future, injure or kill others, and leave our families forever heartbroken because we are gone.

Almost having an accident made a huge impact on my life. It scared me! I can still see that car's headlights coming right at me. I can still hear the horn and squealing tires. When I get behind the wheel, I make sure I keep my eyes on the road, my music turned down low, and my hands on the wheel. **“Arrive alive, don't be distracted when you drive!”**