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Distracted & Dangerous

Helping States Keep Teens Focused on the Road



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End Distracted Driving

WHEN JOEL FELDMAN'S 21-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, Casey, was struck and killed by a distracted driver in July 2009, he never imagined he would parlay what he describes as “telling a sad story,” into an interactive, fun and impactful presentation that is changing teens’ attitudes and behaviors about distracted driving. What’s more the **End Distracted Driving Student Awareness Initiative** (EndDD), sponsored by the Casey Feldman Foundation, is delivered by a network of more than 900 volunteer speakers, 800 of whom are trial lawyers who have volunteered thousands of hours to this cause.

Feldman, a trial lawyer who earned a masters degree in counseling after Casey’s death, readily admits he drove distracted before his daughter’s was tragically killed. (Casey was in the crosswalk at a four-way stop intersection during daylight hours and was struck when the driver reached across the center console for a drink). He worked with researchers at the Center for Injury Research & Prevention at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), psychologists and teen safe driving experts, to develop the 55 to 75-minute program.

EndDD integrates “health communications, behavioral science and behavior change theory, and teen-targeted persuasion principles specifically designed to avoid an unanticipated boomerang effect” (Jacobsohn & Winston, 2012). This means that instead of an individual adopting the suggested positive behavior or attitude (i.e., not texting and driving), the information presented is received as an attempt to restrict personal freedom which may prompt the individual to actually engage in the negative behavior (Gulliver, 2014).

Like Impact Teen Drivers, EndDD employs research, facts, emotion, and humor to educate teens. Facilitators use a PowerPoint presentation and script, both downloadable at no cost from EndDD.org, to help teens understand what distraction is as well as engage in a discussion about its various forms, not all of which are illegal. The presentation is designed not to be confrontational. Teens are surprised when facilitators admit they had often driven distracted themselves and won’t lecture or tell them what to do, but rather ask for their help in solving what is not just a teen problem. Humorous and tragic videos discussing real people whose lives have been affected by distracted driving are woven into the presentation to help teens explore how the choices they make can have life-long consequences. EndDD.org created a number of videos that are used in the program, including one that is part of the USDOT *Faces of Distracted Driving* series. Throughout the presentation teens are asked to commit to taking specific steps to drive safer and to formulate a plan for distraction-free driving using the [EndDD.org Family Safe Driving Agreement](#).

In addition to asking teens to reflect on their own driving behaviors, they’re taught that they can effectively intervene when others drive distracted. Teens participate in role play exercises to help them try out and gain confidence in using bystander intervention strategies. The goal of EndDD.org is to have teens become safety advocates for their peers, parents and communities and to change the driving culture so that distraction-free driving will not only be socially accept-



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able but expected. Teens also participate in a simple interactive exercise – writing backwards from 100 to zero while engaged in a cell phone conversation – to demonstrate how easily their skills are diminished when they attempt to multi-task. The program is grounded in the belief that when teens learn first-hand the facts and consequences of distracted driving, they're more likely to make positive choices that are long-lasting (EndDD, 2014).

Evaluation is also built into the program. EndDD worked with CHOP to develop pre- and post-surveys that include both qualitative and quantitative questions. Teens are asked not only to evaluate the program, but also to indicate if they're adopting the behavioral objectives. Data obtained to date reveals the program is beginning to have an impact. Teens are talking with their parents about distracted driving resulting in a reduction in parent texting (so far the drop for teens isn't statistically significant). Teens also agree that it's okay to speak up when they observe unsafe actions in the car. The presentation is reviewed and updated annually based on input from researchers and the fourth version will be released in the fall of 2014.

Although facilitators do not need to be lawyers, the majority of EndDD.org presentations are given by trial lawyers. "While the public perception about trial lawyers may be mixed, trial lawyers have enthusiastically endorsed the campaign and are reaching out in communities across the country and Canada to speak with teens," noted Feldman. "When I shared my story with them and asked for their help, 500 signed up in the first two weeks. They're sympathetic to the cause, good communicators, tend to stick to the script, and their volunteer efforts have

been praised by educators, law enforcement, safety advocates, and employers across the country." Driver education instructors, healthcare professionals, injury prevention coordinators, and safety professionals also regularly facilitate presentations and EndDD.org works with youth organizations supporting their safety programs and efforts.

Since 2012 approximately 200,000 teens and 25,000 adults have participated in the program through schools, colleges and businesses. An online presentation for parents, prompted by many teens commenting that they wished their parents were attending the program with them, is in the works, as well as a distracted walking segment. Presentation videos and a distracted driving brochure can be downloaded from EndDD.org.

While EndDD has the most traction in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana, Colorado, Texas, and Florida, it has also reached audiences in 36 other states and several Canadian provinces. The program can be tailored to incorporate stories and information specific to a state or community and EndDD.org regularly partners with local safety organizations. A list of registered facilitators is available on the EndDD.org website. The campaign currently works with 26 state trial lawyer associations and requires all facilitators to register with the campaign and sign an agreement before downloading presentation materials.

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