



Kids Speaking Up for Road Safety

Distracted Driving Lesson Plans for Grades 2–6

Lesson Plan: A Lesson on Distracted Driving

Grade Level: 4–5

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- understand what it means to be distracted in a variety of situations.
- identify environmental distractions and behaviors that lead to distraction.
- recognize distracted driving when it is occurring.
- as passengers, address distracted driving in a non-confrontational and effective way using “I” statements.
- as passengers, recognize their own behaviors that might distract the driver, and refrain from those behaviors.

Materials

- Chart paper, easel and markers or a dry erase/chalkboard to record discussions and student responses
- A large screen or monitor for presenting the videos
- Worksheet: Recognizing Distracted Driving and Using the SAM Strategy
- Four chairs
- Safe Driving Pledge forms
- “I” Statement Reference Cards

Introduce the Lesson

Say: *It's helpful to think ahead about how to handle some kinds of situations. We practice fire drills so that we know what to do if there's a fire. You may have a plan in place at home so that everyone knows what to do if there's a fire or if a bad storm hits. Today we'll be talking about another way to practice safety.*

In this lesson, we will talk about what it means to be distracted and how being distracted in different situations can affect us and other people around us. We'll talk in detail about distracted driving, what that is, and what we can do about it. Our discussion will involve talking about our feelings. Today while we're talking, we're going to practice using "I" statements. An "I" statement is when we say how we're feeling or what we're thinking about by saying "I feel" or "I think" at the beginning of the sentence. This is a great way to make sure everyone understands how you are feeling, and it's also a great strategy when you need to talk to people about something that bothers you.

Define and Discuss Being Distracted

Tell students they are going to watch a short video about distractions.

 Show **Video 1: Defining Distraction.**

After the video is finished, have students raise their hands to answer the following questions: *How many of you know what the word distracted means? Do you ever get distracted?*

Ask: *What does it mean to be distracted? (Possible response: You aren't paying attention to what you're doing.)*

Ask: *What are some of the things that distract you? (Possible responses: loud noises, siblings or classmates playing or roughhousing, a baby crying, thinking about video games, being hungry, being upset or angry or excited about something, thinking about something you're going to do later)* Some students may connect distraction with the inability to focus and concentrate. Show appreciation for what they share, but maintain the focus of the discussion on being distracted.

Ask: *How might you be distracted at school? At home? While playing sports or participating in clubs like scouts? With your family?* Allow for a variety of responses while keeping the focus of the discussion on ways students can be distracted.

Ask: *Why do you think people become distracted? (Possible answers: They are trying to do too many things at once. They have other things on their minds besides the task they are completing. They are tired, bored, or sad.)*

Ask the following questions and elicit responses from volunteers:

- Have you ever felt scared or worried because someone else was distracted?
- Have you ever felt distracted because someone else was distracted?
- How do you deal with distraction in others?
- How does it make you feel when others are distracted? Do you feel annoyed? Do you feel disrespected?

Encourage students to respond with “I” statements: “I felt scared/worried/distracted when . . .”. Point out that there aren’t “right” or “wrong” answers to these questions. Sharing feelings is another way to handle or deal with a situation.

Define Distracted Driving

Say: Now that we’re all clear about what it means to be distracted, let’s turn our attention to distracted driving. It can be scary to think about or talk about a topic like this. The purpose of our discussion is to give you some tools to use when you’re in a distracted driving situation. Knowing what to do in advance can help you change a situation in a positive way.

Ask: What is distracted driving? (Possible response: Distracted driving is when the driver is paying attention to anything that is not related to driving the vehicle.)

On chart paper or the board, write the heading **Things Drivers Do That Distract Them**. As students respond to the following question, list their answers under the heading.

Ask: What are some things drivers do that could cause them to be distracted? (Possible responses: talking on the phone, texting, eating or drinking, adjusting the radio, handing things to passengers in the back seat or turning to talk to them, putting on make-up or shaving)

Now write the heading **How I Feel About Distracted Driving**. As students respond to the following question, list their answers under the heading.

Ask: How do you feel when you’re a passenger in a car and the driver is distracted? (Possible responses: It’s scary. I feel like something bad is going to happen. I’m worried we’ll crash. I get angry at the driver. I feel disrespected.) Reassure students that feeling scared or worried or angry is natural and that it is common to be frightened or anxious in a distracted driving situation.

Ask: *Have you ever asked a driver to put his or her phone down? How did he or she respond?* Students' answers to this question will vary. Their answers may reflect fears or anxiety caused by the situation. Use calming language that acknowledges their feelings, such as "That must have been scary," "I'm glad you're okay," or "It can be hard to speak up sometimes." Some students may relate that they did speak up when a parent or guardian was distracted while driving and were met with annoyance or anger. Let these students know that they will learn some strategies for addressing distracted driving that might work better for them .


Note that any driver can be distracted, including older siblings, friends' parents, carpool drivers, and bus drivers. Distracted driving isn't just a problem within one's own family.

Introduce the SAM Framework

Explain that you will now review a problem-solving strategy called **SAM**. Write the framework on your chart paper or the board:

- **See** a problem.
- **Address** the problem using an "I" statement.
- **Make** an action plan together.

Tell students they will now watch another short video that explains how **SAM** can be used to solve problems.

 Show **Video 2: SAM Framework**.

After the video, tell students they will now focus on using **SAM** in a distracted driving situation.

Say: *Here are some examples of seeing a problem.* Write the examples on your chart paper or the board.

You notice that your mom, who is driving, turned to check on the baby in the back seat, and the car went over the center line.

You notice that your older brother, who is driving, was fiddling with his smartphone and the car seemed to speed up quite a bit at the same time.

Ask for more examples. Note that some students may be timid about offering responses—they may feel they are not allowed to talk about their parents or their parents' driving behavior. Let them know that they can use their voice to share concerns while remaining respectful.

Review the use of "I" statements with students. Say: *We can address, or speak about, problems with "I" statements. An "I" statement allows the speaker to say how he or she feels without blaming or putting the other person on the defensive. Using an "I" statement shows that you respect the other person, even when you don't like what they're doing.* Give some examples of "You" statements—"You're not paying attention to the road," "You're texting, when you should just be driving," "The car is swerving back and forth because you're talking on the phone," "You scare me when you drive like this"—and ask volunteers for examples of their own. Reiterate that "you" statements sound blaming and critical. If you make a "you" statement to someone, they might feel angry or hurt, and they probably won't listen.

Then write these examples of "I" statements on the board:

I feel scared when you look at your phone instead of the road.

I don't feel safe when you're using your phone and driving.

Give students some practice in formulating "I" statements. Have them work in pairs to role-play the following situations:

- A friend borrows something, and when it is returned, it is broken. Use an "I" statement to tell how you feel about this.
- Your friend is going to try a dangerous trick on her skateboard that you know she can't handle. Use an "I statement" to express your concern to her.
- Your classmates are playing a game at recess, and you are left out. Use an "I" statement to tell your classmates how you feel about being left out.

After pairs complete their role plays, ask volunteers to share some of the "I" statements they used.

Explain that every problem has a solution and that kids can be problem solvers. It is helpful to think through some potential problems before they happen, so that you know what to do if the situation comes up.

Write these examples on the board of how to **Make An Action Plan and Work Together** to solve the problem of distracted driving:

“Let’s pull over to get my water bottle from under the seat. We’re not in a hurry.”

“Can I answer the phone for you?”

“I’ll text Grandma and let her know we’re almost there.”

Now, tell students they will watch a third video that shows **SAM** in action.

Distribute the **Recognizing Distracted Driving and Using the SAM Strategy** worksheet and tell students that they will now have a chance to practice what they have learned. Have students complete the worksheet individually. When they are done, if time allows, have them share their responses with a partner or ask two or three volunteers to share the “I” statements and solution statements they came up with.

 Show **Video 3: Driving Scenario**

Following the video, discuss how the family solved the problem of distracted driving. Encourage students to brainstorm other ways to solve distracted driving issues, and list their responses on the board. If needed, suggest the following to begin the conversation:

- making sure all phones are on silent or turned off, or put the phone in Do Not Disturb While Driving mode (for more information on this topic see: <https://www.enddd.org/end-distracted-driving/technology-we-can-use-to-keep-us-and-those-we-care-about-safe-from-driving-distractions/>)
- creating a phone storage area in the vehicle
- turning the ringer or sound off on any device used in the car so it doesn’t create more distraction

Role Play

Arrange four chairs in two rows of two to replicate the front and back seats of a vehicle. Invite four volunteers to the front of the room and have them sit facing their classmates. Assign one student the role of “driver.” The other front seat passenger can be another adult, and the backseat passengers can be children.

First, have the passengers distract the driver. Students are likely to have lots of fun with this part of the

activity. Allow this to continue for a minute or so. Then ask the driver some questions:

- How did you feel when they were distracting you?
- Do you think you would have been a very good driver with all those distractions? Why or why not?

Next, have the students demonstrate how safe and helpful passengers would act. Remind students of the rules for safe passengers they discussed earlier. Ask the driver new questions:

- How did you feel when they were working on not being a distraction?
- Was it easier to concentrate? Why or why not?
- Which set of passengers would you rather drive? Why?

Invite a new group of students up and have them role play one or more of the following situations using the **SAM** framework.

- The driver is taking a picture with his or her smartphone and trying to post it to Instagram.
- One of the children in the backseat is complaining loudly about how long they have been riding in the car. "Are we there yet?"
- A phone is ringing, but it has fallen into the backseat of the car. The driver is trying to reach the phone, while still driving.

For each situation, have a student sitting in the "back seat" see the problem, address the problem with an "I" statement, and then work with the driver to make a plan.

After the role-playing activity concludes, debrief by asking the "passengers" some questions:

- How did you feel when you noticed that the driver was distracted?
- How did you feel when you used an "I" statement to address the problem?
- How did you feel when you made a plan?

**Make a Chart:
Being a Safe
Passenger**

On chart paper or the board, draw a two-column chart. Label the first column **How Passengers Can Distract a Driver** and the second column **How Passengers Can Keep from Distracting the Driver**. Note students' responses to the following questions in the chart as they respond.

How can passengers cause a driver to be distracted? (Possible responses: arguing with other passengers or the driver, not sitting still, asking the driver to hand them things, tapping the driver or kicking the back of the driver's seat, playing loud music or games)

Remind students that passengers need to make safe choices, too, and do their best not to distract the driver. Not acting in a way that distracts a driver shows respect for everyone in the car, including oneself, and everyone on the road.

Ask: *How can passengers avoid being a distraction to a driver?* Make sure the following tips are included:

- *Don't make loud noises in the car.*
- *Don't argue or fight.*
- *Don't ask the driver to turn around to look at something or hand you something.*
- *Don't tap, touch, or kick the driver while he or she is driving.*
- *Buckle your seat belt and sit quietly. Don't unbuckle your seat belt while the car is moving.*

If students put the blame elsewhere—for example, on a sibling or a friend—for distracting behavior, remind them that we are each in control of our own behavior. We can be in control of ourselves, even when others aren't in control of themselves.

If a student brings up feelings of guilt or anxiety over past behaviors or experiences, reassure him or her that past experiences are in the past and he or she is learning how to make better choices in the future.

Conclude the Lesson

Remind students that their parents were informed that they would be having a lesson on distracted driving and that their parents are expecting them to bring home a pledge. The next step is to have a conversation with their parents about what they learned about distracted driving from the lesson.

Suggest that students go home and set up a time with their parents and family members when everyone can be comfortable and relaxed so that the discussion is not rushed. Suggest that they think of what they want to say ahead of time. Display a list of possible icebreakers, and allow students to add to the list:

- Mom, I have something important for us to talk about.
- Today we had a lesson about being distracted and how it can be dangerous.
- I learned about distracted driving today, and I'd like to have a family talk about it.

- I learned about being safe in the car today, and I want to share what I learned.

Explain that the pledge handout includes instructions for creating a family “safe word” that can be used when someone in the car notices distracted driving. This word provides a simple way for any passenger to point out that the driver is distracted, even when they can’t put their thoughts together quickly enough to say what they are noticing. Having a safe word is a time-saving way to point out a dangerous situation.

Review the pledge content and hand out the **“I” Statement Reference Cards** that students can keep in their backpacks or somewhere in the car. Explain that students can use this card to remember the meaning of the acronym **SAM** and to see examples of language they could use in distracted driving situations. There is also space on the card for students to write their family’s safe word.

To end the lesson, give students a few minutes to write or draw at least two things that they took away from the lesson. Students can share their drawings in small groups or with the whole class to bring closure.

Also, this can be a good time to hand out the Activity Sheets to students at this time to work on in class, or to bring home.