



Kids Speaking Up for Road Safety

Distracted Driving Lesson Plans for Grades 2–6

Lesson Plan: A Lesson on Distracted Driving

Grade Level: 6

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

- A short text at students’ reading level
- Chart paper, easel and markers or a dry erase/chalkboard to record discussions and student responses
- A screen or large monitor for presenting the videos
- Four chairs and a frisbee or other circular prop to be used as a “steering wheel”
- Worksheet: Put Yourself in the Driver’s Seat
- 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'll talk about distracted driving. You'll learn how to recognize distracted driving and what to do if you notice someone is distracted while driving. You'll also identify things passengers do that take drivers' attention away from the road. These tips and tools are meant to keep you safe while riding in a car. Just as with a fire drill or a severe weather drill, we hope that we never have to put these skills into practice. But it's good to be prepared and know what to do if you're a passenger in a car with a distracted driver.

**Activity:
Defining
Distraction**

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

 Show **Video 1: Defining Distraction.**

After the video, ask: *What does it mean to be distracted? (Possible responses: You lose focus. You aren't paying attention. You're thinking about something other than what you're supposed to be thinking about.)*

What are some other examples of people being distracted? (Possible responses: tripping because you aren't watching where you're walking; you can't answer a question in class, because you were staring out the window and missed what the teacher said; you forget what you're saying because someone interrupts you)

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

Have you been in a situation where others around you are distracted? Did you feel annoyed? Disrespected? unsafe? Elicit examples from two or three volunteers.

Explain that everyone becomes distracted at times. Point out that, in some situations, being distracted can put the distracted person and others in danger. Not allowing yourself to be distracted when, for

example, you're riding your bike, shows respect for yourself and others.

**Guided
Discussion:
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 from the Road**. 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.) 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." 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 and "I" Statements

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.

"Mom, I noticed you just drove over the center line."

"Dad, it looks like you're having trouble steering with your knees."

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:

- On Monday, you find out that a group of friends went to the movies over the weekend and you weren’t invited. Use an “I” statement to tell how you feel about this.
- Two of your friends are arguing and you want them to stop. Use an “I” statement to address the situation.
- Your parent is shaving or putting on makeup while driving. Use an “I” statement to tell him or her how you feel about this.

After the pairs role-play each scenario, invite volunteers to share the “I” statements they came up with.

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 arises.


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. 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.

 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, such as making sure all phones are turned off

while driving, creating a phone storage area in the vehicle, or turning the ringer or sound down 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. As time allows, have the group role play one or more of the following situations using the **SAM** framework.

- The driver is lost and starts to use the car's navigation system to find the correct route while still driving the car.
- 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 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 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?

Ask the "driver": *How did you feel about all the distracting behavior in the back seat?*

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)

Review 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:

- *I will not make loud noises in the car.*
- *I will not argue or fight.*
- *I will not ask the driver to turn around to look at something or hand you something.*
- *I will not tap, touch, or kick the driver while he or she is driving.*
- *I will buckle my seat belt and sit quietly. I will not unbuckle my 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.

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.

Worksheet: Put Yourself in the Driver's Shoes

Distribute the worksheet: **Put Yourself in the Driver's Seat**. You may also want to display the questions on the board.

- Do you want to learn how to drive a car? Why or why not?
- Do you think that talking and learning about being distracted now will help you when you start to drive? Why or why not?
- Do you think you might be tempted to text or look at your phone when you drive? If so, under what circumstances?
- Imagine that you are driving and looking at your phone. A passenger in the car tells you that he or she feels nervous when you use your phone while driving. How do you think you would respond?

Give students a few minutes to answer the questions. Then ask volunteers to share their answers with the class. Encourage students to share their answers, even if they don't think they gave the "right" answer. Note that, as time goes on, they can always change their minds about one or more of their answers. For example, if students say they might text or talk on the phone while driving, review some alternatives to

this behavior without placing blame or judgement.

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 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.