

COMMUNITY CORNER

Using cell phones while driving endangers yourself, other motorists

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

While we've already had some summer-like weather in Kansas, the first official day of summer isn't until June 21. June also marks National Safety Month, a time for us to remember the little things we can do to make a big difference in our safety and that of those we love. Throughout this month, the Garrison Safety Office has been promoting different safety topics that bring attention to critical issues. For the last two weeks in June, the focus will be on the dangers of using cell phones while driving and general summer safety including motorcycle safety and heat injury prevention.

The topic I would like to address is distracted driving. In 2008, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, almost 6,000 people died in crashes involving a distracted driver. Just think — because someone was eating in their car, or just "had" to reply to a text message, another person died.

While we mostly think of cell phones when we think of distracted driving, distracted driving applies to anything that takes your eyes off the road. Maybe you dropped something between the seats or spilled



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coffee in your lap. Your ringing cell phone or kids arguing in the backseat are distractions. Changing radio stations and eating cheeseburgers are all distractions.

The NHTSA categorizes inattention in three ways: Visual, taking your eyes off the road; manual, taking your hands off the wheel; and cognitive, taking your mind off the road. When we're behind the wheel, that is our responsibility. Everything else can wait.

What will motivate you to put down that phone while you're driving? Maybe think of those 6,000 lives lost due to inattention. Compare that to the importance of a text message and think twice about trying to multi-task while driving.

On post, talking on a cell

phone while driving, without a hands-free device, is not allowed. If you need to make a phone call or send a text message, pull over or wait until you've reached your destination. Hands-free devices are permitted, but keep conversations to a minimum. If you're thoughts are on your conversation, they aren't on the road in front of you.

Drivers of government vehicles aren't allowed to talk on cell phones without a hands-free device while driving on post or off. And, recently, Kansas lawmakers passed a ban on texting while driving. In Manhattan, lawmakers are looking over a recently passed hand-held phone and texting while driving ban. If it meshes with the new state laws, that

ban would go into effect this July.

While laws can help with this issue, what will make the biggest difference is talking to your teen drivers about the consequences of distracted driving and setting a good example by not doing it ourselves. According to the NHTSA, drivers under 20 years old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes.

One resource you can use to help talk to your teen driver about safe driving is a free download being offered by the National Safety Council during National Safety Month. "Teen Driver: A Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety" provides information on safe driving and a written parent/teen driving agreement that can help define

the rules of the road for your teen. Download the guide at www.nsc.org.

Another resource right here on post is our Garrison Safety Office. They offer a four-hour defensive driving course and have car and motorcycle simulators to help drivers sharpen their skills on the road. Classes are available for Soldiers, Family members and civilians, and once completed may make drivers eligible for insurance discounts. For more information on training and training materials, call the safety office at 785-239-2514.

If you would like to comment on this article or suggest a topic for the Community Corner, e-mail rile.post.newspaper@conus.army.mil.

FAMILY OUTREACH

Close relationship from father can improve development of children

By Sara Mietzner
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Father involvement makes a real difference. In all aspects of development children do well having a father-figure. This is especially true when they share a close relationship whether or not this figure lives with them.

Research tells us that having a strong role model is important for learning certain social, intellectual and coping skills. Dads can indeed be that role model. Even from very early on, fathers can play a

unique role in showing their children how much they care for and respect them.

Some findings about child development show fathers are just as capable of picking up on the meaning of an infant's cry and are willing to take a big part in child rearing and daily care. And when it comes to play, there is little substitute for the rough-and-tumble play with



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dad.

So, being a dad can be hard work. Research suggests there are several keys to overcoming the stress of fatherhood.

First, don't forget about mom. If you are a married dad, one important point to remember is to keep your marriage relationship strong. Don't forget about date, night and celebrate the little things that made your marriage work before you had your little ones around. If your relationship with your child's mother didn't work out, or if you are divorced, focus on maintaining

a civil relationship. Never talk bad about your child's mother in front of your kids, and work to maintain an equal parent partnership.

Another way to overcome the strains and stresses of fatherhood is to get involved and stay involved. Remember, there is almost nothing you can't do for your baby and even teenagers can use a genuine listening ear as they work their way through adolescence. Also, if you have to be away find ways to stay involved in Family activities by calling, instant messaging or sending pictures.

Lastly, don't forget about the power of one-on-one time. This can be a great way to learn more about your children and your spouse. Sometimes it may just be a simple drive in the car or basic home repairs together, but these minutes can lead to powerful conversations in any relationship. Be sure there are times when you can give a little undivided attention: TV off, radio off, cell phones away. It is hard to connect when there are hundreds of things pulling your attention. One-on-one conversations also can lead to stronger connections with your

children on all levels.

Make sure you are learning about your child's activities, school interests, friends and peer groups. Taking time to listen is just as essential as talking. Don't let the conversation slip into question-answer mode. Allow for some silence, and don't rush to fill all the empty gaps in conversation.

Being a dad does make a real difference. Whether you realize it or not, you are one of the building blocks towards your child's success. Help nurture your child in all areas by being a great dad every day.