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[Chad Hughes]: Not every teen accident is the teen being at fault. But when the teen is at fault, generally most times, it's being distracted. And if it's not from being distracted, it's not being experienced. Inclement weather. Driving on ice, driving on snow, driving in the rain, sun being in your eyes.

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From WHJE, this is First Responders 411, getting you the inside scoop on first responders in and around Carmel.

[SFX TWO]

I'm Tatum Prati.

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[Tatum]: The leading cause of death for teenagers is car crashes. They are in more accidents than any other age group. I talked to Carmel firefighter, Captain Chad Hughes. He shared his experiences with teen crashes.

[Chad]: I've been doing this since 1989. And before coming to Carmel, I was a volunteer in Northern Hamilton County in Cicero. So I saw a lot of high speed accidents. I've seen a lot of low speed accidents. Whether just a fender bender to car accidents involving multiple semis and snow storms and multiple vehicles with entrapment. Having to extricate or cut people out with the proverbial, the jaws of life. But yes, we have responded... personally, I have to dozens, hundreds of car accidents involving teenagers through the years.

[Tatum]: I also talked to Carmel Police Officer DJ Schoeff about this issue. He shared what it's like for him to respond to a teen accident.

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[Officer Schoeff]: Anything dealing with kids and their injuries or being victimized in any way shape or form is kind of my worst part of the job. I just don't like any aspect of that. So I've been pretty fortunate in not responding to any major crashes involving teenagers personally. And I know what it does to officers as we respond to those. Many officers are impacted. You know, it's very difficult to respond to especially when there's a serious injury or a death to a young person. I have been pretty fortunate in my career, and I haven't had to deal with that on a direct impact. Now I've been in situations working inside the school where we've had teenagers or young children seriously injured and or killed as a result of a car crash. So there's some crisis management especially back to the school whenever something of that nature happens.

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[Tatum]: Captain Hughes also explained his involvement in a car accident.

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[Captain Hughes]: If we can deliver the patient to the appropriate medical facility for definitive care, then we have completed our task meaning in layman's terms, if we can deliver the patient breathing with a pulse so that the trauma team can take over, then really as an EMS provider, emergency medical service, we have fulfilled our obligation. And that's what we want to give these victims of car accidents the opportunity to be saved by the surgeons and trauma teams. If we can get that patient from the time of the accident to a trauma center, a level one trauma center with surgeons on standby within that sixty minutes, then their survivability increases

dramatically. So we call that the golden hour. And then within that sixty minutes, there's a ten minute platinum period. We want to be able to be on the scene less than ten minutes if possible.

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[Tatum]: Depending on the severity of the crash, an air ambulance can be sent to the site of the accident.

[Captain Hughes]: Sometimes it's a medic and a nurse. Sometimes it's a doctor and a nurse in the helicopter. But they carry other equipment that we don't have such as blood and some of the other life saving equipment that they're able to do in the helicopter. Then obviously they're able to transport quicker than we can by ground.

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[Tatum]: Several students at Carmel High School have been in car crashes. Senior Tess Nihill got in one at the beginning of her junior year.

[Tess]: It was coming home from after school. So a bus pulled out of a neighborhood, and the guy in front of me slammed on his brakes. Like, the bus shouldn't have gone. And so I slammed on mine. Then the guy behind me didn't notice, so he just like rear-ended me. I didn't notice that I got hit at first. I drove away. And then I was like, I looked in my rearview mirror, and I was like, "Well, that guy's car is smashed in, and I was in front of him. So I'm assuming the back of my car is smashed in." I pulled over into a neighborhood, and I looked at the back. And I looked at the guy's car, and I was like... my first thought was, "Oh my gosh, my mom's gonna yell at me." And then I think I started crying, and I called my mom. And I was like, "Mom, I got in an accident." And she was like, she wasn't mad, she was just like, "Are you okay?" And then she came and dealt with the insurance because I'm inept and don't know how to do that.

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[Tatum]: Fortunately, Tess was fine, and her car was only compressed about an inch. The other driver was a senior at CHS at the time. He was alright too, but his car was totaled. The front of it was crushed, and his windshield had burst. Senior Ellie Clark also got in an accident last school year. She and the person who hit her were both on their way to school.

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[Ellie]: It was right in the morning. I was running a little bit late. And so I guess a lot of people were in a rush. We were at a stoplight at the roundabout, the traffic was stopped. But then the person who came up behind me and was getting off, just must have not noticed that everyone was stopped because that's how... she, the person ran into me. Both of our cars, actually, were totaled. My car didn't really look like it had that bad of damage, but the mechanics just couldn't fix it. The person who hit me's car was just pretty bad. It definitely wasn't drivable. A tow truck had to come and take it away because the entire front was just bashed in. And there was glass shattered on the road. It was pretty scary. It made a really loud sound. I'll never forget that. I kind of always check my rearview mirror just to make sure nothing like this would happen. But then, I saw the car coming behind me. And it just was not slowing down. And so I kind just gripped the steering wheel and braced my head against the seat and was just like, "Okay, here we go. Like, this person is not going to stop." 'Cause I couldn't run into the person ahead of me. I think I had my foot on the brake, too, just because we were stopped. That helped me from rolling into the car in front of me. So that's how it didn't chain react. And I just pulled off on the side of the road, and so did the other car. And then I called my dad. And he actually is the one who called the police.

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[Tatum]: Officer Schoeff explained a little more about why teens are in more accidents than other age groups.

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[Officer Schoeff]: There are a significant number of teenage accidents that involve teenagers that are a result of high speeds. And that goes right back to that brain development and that the rear brain which is all about the fun and the excitement and the adrenaline. That's very powerful in a teenage brain. Where the front brain is that logic and thinking and looking being able to see those potential consequences. Although we have some of that, the literal term for this that happens is the rear brain actually hijacks that front brain. And we literally lose track of the ability to think about what our consequences are which is where we see some of the risky behavior in teenagers. And when we put them behind the wheel of a car having that responsibility along with that teen brain development, those risks are there for the high speeds, the quick maneuvers, the following too closely, not thinking about what those potential consequences are.

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[Tatum]: When a teenager is in an accident, it often serves as a wake up call to drive more defensively. Officer Schoeff hopes that when he pulls a teenager over, it will encourage them to start driving more responsibly before they end up getting in an accident.

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[Officer Schoeff]: It goes back to that I want the success of our kids. That, I believe truly, that the youth in our community is the greatest asset to our community. It's the future of our community. So if I stop someone that's speeding, there is an opportunity in my opinion for an education of helping them understand what those potential consequences are, guiding them on

that. And sometimes that requires a citation. As law enforcement, there's discretion in that whether we write that ticket or warning.

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[Tatum]: While teens are the most likely to get in a car accident, these crashes can be prevented.

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[Ellie]: Don't show off ever or try to drive fast.

[Tess]: Be extra careful, especially around buses because they have deadlines to get people home.

[Ellie]: Staying off your phones, and paying attention, not keeping the music too loud.

[Tess]: Not follow people as closely when you're driving.

[Ellie]: Be a safe driver. There's not much more to it.

[Tatum]: This has been Tatum Prati for WHJE. More stories like this can be found at [whje.com](http://whje.com).

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