**Driving and Autism**

You’re 16 years old, and now it’s legal to learn to drive.

The big question is: do you want to?

The next question is then: will you be able to?

**What does the research tell us?**

It is limited, there are only a handful of studies:

One study of adult drivers (Daly et al, 2014) found that adult drivers with autism

* Obtained their licences later
* More likely to rate themselves as “poor drivers”
* More likely to place restrictions on their driving e.g. avoiding traffic, night driving and highways.

Another study (Cox et al, 2012) that surveyed 123 parents of teen drivers with autism found that:

* The majority of parents rated single skills such as maintaining lane position, turning, speech control,
* braking and use of turn signals as “not difficult to teach”
* However, a majority of parents rated complex skills such as awareness of traffic (55%) and multi-tasking (65%) as
* very difficult to teach
* This same set of parents stated that the most helpful strategies included practice and repetition, teaching skills in small steps, providing verbal or visual scripts prior to starting out on a drive and being calm and patient
* The least helpful strategy was showing emotionality such as raising their voice, getting upset or cringing and talking too much.

**Tips for Driving for the learner**

Things To Think About

* Are you ready to accept instruction and constructive criticism?
* Do you feel able to take the responsibility for driving, bearing in mind you have to be aware of the safety of other road users?
* Are you ready to learn the rules of the road?
* Are you able to maintain attention for a reasonable length of time?
* Are you able to problem-solve and react quickly?
* Do you ride a bicycle? Are you confident riding on the roads and using road rules?

**Tips For Parents**

* Your GP may require an individualised assessment from a driver trained assessor
* Alternatively, you may opt to arrange for this kind of assessment yourself if you or your child are unsure about potential driving ability
* Break down skills into small steps and teach to mastery – lots of repetition and practice
* It may take longer to teach a person with autism to drive
* Some people with autism may not be ready to learn to drive until they are somewhat older than their peers
* Remain calm or utilise a professional driver trainer
* Talk through or role play possible social situations related to driving e.g. what to do if pulled over by police, what to do in the event of an accident
* Directly teach some of the non-verbal communication and other signals associated with driving e.g. drivers using flashing of lights to get your attention, hand signals or flashing lights to indicate that they are letting

SOURCE: Launch pad is a resource specifically for young people with autism and their families who are about to leave school. Check out <http://www.autismlaunchpad.org.au/learning/drive/> for further information.