

Every time we get in a car, we're taking a chance. A chance for our own lives and the lives of everyone around us. It doesn't feel that way, though. Driving feels normal; routine. But the truth is, we're in control of a multi-ton machine, going fast, and trusting that people around us know what they're doing just as much as we hope we do. It's about realizing that every second behind the wheel carries weight. Someone's life depends on what you choose to do behind the wheel. Yours included. One decision can change everything.

We treat driving like it's just part of life. But the unfortunate truth is most of the time, it's not the weather or the road that causes these crashes. It's us. Human error is the biggest reason lives are lost, driving while texting is common among teen drivers is an example.

We hop in and out of our cars without thinking. School. Work. A quick drive to get food. But every time we drive, there's a risk. A risk we forget because it doesn't feel like one. The reality: cars are heavy, they're fast, and they're unforgiving. Behind every driving statistic is a person. A family. A story that never got to finish. In the U.S. alone, over 30,000 people die in car crashes every year; that's 30,000 people who were texting their loved ones, playing music, running late, laughing. When you realize that, it hits different. Driving is about making sure you and everyone else get there at all. That truth—that one moment can change everything— isn't just a warning.

Distracted driving is a huge issue, and I was impacted by it. The tragic death of my cousin when he was hit by a car had a profound and lasting impact on our family. As my aunt latched onto my baby cousin, she was carrying and holding the hand of my 6-year-old cousin, when a woman was carelessly reversing in the parking spot. Boom! He died when I was 6. The loss of my cousin, who was practically my twin, my other half, meant I wouldn't be able to continue going to the same school as him, celebrating birthdays, arguing over something as

simple as the remote. During a time of profound grief, all while navigating the emotional rollercoaster of losing his cousin as a child. The worst part about it was that they were only a crosswalk away from my house. Almost to the house, until the next thing you know, a swarm of flashing lights from the ambulance is outside my house. A young life was lost because she didn't take the extra precautionary measure and look in the rearview mirror. She admitted to her negligence because she was distracted by her phone.

Since the night I've lost my best friend to a multi-ton vehicle that his small and fragile body didn't stand a chance against, I began to promote safer driving. And it's that personal wake-up call that shifted how I think about driving to this day. I've become far more conscious of how fragile driving really is. That one choice—to pause, to wait, to respond to the message or look at the notification you received in a few moments—could be the difference between making it home or not. But change can't come from individual choices. It has to be built into how we teach and approach driving from the beginning.

To raise awareness of the dangers of distracted driving and prevent this behavior among young drivers, driver education shouldn't be just a checkbox on the way to getting a license. It should be a mindset shift, an understanding that driving is one of the most dangerous things we do on a regular basis. Too often, young drivers treat it like a background task. Music up, phone buzzing, eyes flicking between the road and the screen. One moment of distraction can change someone else's life forever.

To reduce driving-related deaths, we need to change both education and culture. High schools should require workshops on distracted and impaired driving, using real stories, survivor testimonies, and science-based education. Driving simulators that mimic dangerous conditions (rain, texting, low visibility) can help students feel the real consequences of careless decisions.

We should also teach emotional awareness behind the wheel: how to recognize when you're too tired, too upset, or too rushed to drive safely.