

The land of the FREE?

Imagine a place where teenagers must legally be at home after 10 p.m. and where police officers search the streets for them at night. Imagine a place where the police can arrest teenagers or give them a **fine** for being on the streets, even if they aren't breaking any other law, like drinking alcohol or **committing** vandalism. Does this sound like a science fiction movie about the future? It isn't. It's an American city in the 21st century. Here are some facts that might surprise you about life for teenagers in some states of the U.S.

1 Street curfews

Since the 1990s, hundreds of large American cities, including San Diego, New Orleans, and Chicago, have introduced legal curfews on their teenagers. A curfew means that young people under 18 have to be off the streets and at home after a certain time at night, which varies from 10 p.m. to midnight, depending on the city or day of the week. There are some exceptions. Teenagers are allowed to stay out at night with an adult, or if they are coming home from a job, or an activity at school or church. The curfew laws exist to **prevent** crime, and to force parents to take more responsibility for their children. Some studies show that young people's crime has gone down in the cities that have curfews, but other studies say the opposite. People who oppose the laws say that they **discriminate against** young people. They also say that the laws oppose the American Constitution, which promises liberty to all its citizens. In a few states, the **courts** have forced certain cities to **remove** their teenage curfew laws.



2 Driving curfews

In the U.S., the legal age for driving in most states is 16, but some states ban anyone under the age of 18 or 21 from driving after a certain time at night, even though they have a driver's license. In South Carolina, which probably has the strictest driving curfew, under-18s must not drive after 6 p.m. in the winter, or 8 p.m. in the summer, unless they are with an adult who has a driver's license.

3 Driving restrictions

In general, American teenagers aren't allowed to drive a car with more than one other teenage passenger unless the passenger is related to them. The reason for these driving laws is that car accidents are the biggest cause of death for teenagers, and two-thirds of teenage passenger deaths happen in a car with a teenage driver. In some states, people under the age of 21 have to put a red **sticker** on their car **license plates** to show police that they are young drivers.



Step 1

1 Look at the pictures and answer the questions.

- 1 Are these teenagers doing anything illegal?
- 2 How often do you ...
 - stay out after 10 p.m. at night?
 - travel in a car with a driver who is under the age of 21?

Step 2

2 Read the article. Answer the questions.

- 1 What is a curfew?
- 2 How many cities in the U.S. have teenage curfew laws?
- 3 When did some cities introduce curfew laws?
- 4 At what age can most Americans take their driver's test?

3 Explain if these teenagers are breaking the law or not in the U.S. cities mentioned in the text.

- 1 A group of 16-year-olds is talking on a street corner after they have been to a party. It's 10:30 p.m.
- 2 A 17-year-old is walking home at 11 p.m. because he's just finished working in a restaurant.
- 3 A 16-year-old is driving to her grandparents' house in South Carolina in December. She has a driver's license. It's 7 p.m.
- 4 A 17-year-old is driving to the movie theater in the afternoon with his girlfriend of the same age.
- 5 A 19-year-old is driving her younger brothers to school. She has a driver's license.

4 Find the **highlighted** words in the text and translate them into your own language.

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|----------|------------------|
| 1 fine | 3 prevent | 5 courts | 7 sticker |
| 2 committing | 4 discriminate against | 6 remove | 8 license plates |

5 Read the opinions. Say which ones are arguing in favor of the laws and which ones are arguing against them.

1

The curfew laws in the U.S. are necessary because they prevent crime.

2

The teenage driving laws are necessary because they save lives.

3

Teenagers often drive dangerously, so society needs laws to stop them.

4

Young people's freedom is more important than laws like these.

5

Teenagers usually cause trouble if adults don't control them.

6

Teenagers are nearly adults. They don't need laws like these.

Step 3