

Kelley Blue Book's 2026 Best Cars for Teens, Where Safety Meets Affordability

ATLANTA, Oct. 19, 2026 [/PRNewswire/](#) -- Handing your teen the keys for the first time is a major milestone and one that requires careful consideration for parents. Safety often tops the list, but in today's economic environment, affordability is an increasingly important part of those final decisions on which car to choose. Today, Kelley Blue Book, a Cox Automotive brand, has unveiled the [2026 Best Cars for Teens](#), a comprehensive list of new and used vehicles that offer the combination of safety, reliability, affordability and everyday practicality families should prioritize when shopping for a young driver.



Kelley Blue Book

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), the crash rate for 16–19-year-olds is over 4 times the rate for drivers 20 and older, underscoring the importance of putting safety first when choosing a vehicle for a young driver. With this statistic top of mind for Kelley Blue Book experts, they recommend looking for a vehicle that offers strong crash protection, manageable size and power, and safety technology that can provide an added layer of support.

At-a-Glance Tips

- When you plan your budget for a vehicle, it may also be wise to factor in the potential cost of repair and bodywork, as well as increased insurance premiums.
- The types of cars to avoid for young drivers: tiny cars, oversized SUVs and trucks, and high-horsepower vehicles.
- Advanced safety features to look for include anti-lock brakes, automatic emergency braking, blind-spot monitoring, and forward collision and lane-departure warnings.
- Consider the "Big Three" of safety features if shopping for a used vehicle: anti-lock brakes, traction control, and stability control.

"Choosing a first car for a teen is a big decision for parents, and we know safety and affordability are two of the most prominent factors they're considering," said Sean Tucker, managing editor at Kelley Blue Book. "Our Best Cars for Teens list is designed to alleviate some of the guesswork and ensure parents find options that fit their budgets while still giving them the peace of mind they need."

Kelley Blue Book's 2026 Best New and Used Cars for Teens Lists

When creating the Best Cars for Teens lists, the Kelley Blue Book experts set specific parameters. Pricing was based on Kelley Blue Book Fair Purchase Price range. Where a model offers both a sedan and hatchback, pricing was used for the sedan. All picks in the "Under \$30,000" and "Under \$20,000" lists come with the advanced safety and driver-assist features listed above, and they all have at least a "Good" rating in at least five of the IIHS crash tests. However, almost all the vehicles listed at the various price points are a Top Safety Pick or Top Safety Pick+. While older vehicles often are not available with all the latest safety features, the vehicles selected in the more affordable Best Cars for Teens lists have many of them and performed very well in National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and IIHS testing. All vehicles listed are lauded for their reliability and fuel economy.

The Best New Cars for Teens:

- 2026 Honda HR-V
- 2026 Toyota Prius
- 2026 Mazda CX-30
- 2026 Hyundai Kona
- 2026 Mazda3
- 2026 Honda Civic
- 2026 Kia K4
- 2026 Hyundai Elantra Hybrid
- 2026 Toyota Corolla Cross (also Corolla)
- 2026 Subaru Crosstrek

Finding the right vehicle also means finding the right fit for a family's budget. While newer vehicles are more likely to offer the latest advanced safety and driver-assistance features, it's still possible to find options that provide strong crash protection, proven reliability and many of the same safety features without breaking the bank.

Best Used Cars Under \$20,000

- 2017 Toyota RAV4
- 2020 Mazda CX-5
- 2018 Honda CR-V
- 2022 Toyota Corolla Hybrid
- 2019 Subaru Forester
- 2021 Mazda3
- 2019 Honda Accord
- 2020 Toyota Prius
- 2020 Subaru Crosstrek
- 2020 Honda Civic
- 2021 Chevrolet Equinox

Best Used Cars Under \$15,000:

- 2016 Honda CR-V
- 2017 Subaru Forester
- 2017 Toyota Corolla
- 2015 Honda Accord
- 2016 Subaru Crosstrek
- 2016 Toyota Prius
- 2017 Mazda CX-5
- 2018 Kia Sportage
- 2016 Honda Civic
- 2018 Mazda3
- 2019 Kia Soul

Best Used Cars Under \$10,000:

- 2013 Toyota Camry
- 2014 Mazda3
- 2013 Toyota Corolla
- 2009 Toyota RAV4
- 2009 Honda Element
- 2011 Toyota Avalon

For more information about the Best Cars for Teens from Kelley Blue Book, including detailed expert reviews, safety information for each model and more, visit <https://www.kbb.com/best-cars/teens/>.

About Kelley Blue Book

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data-driven, innovative tools for consumers, automotive dealers and manufacturers. Kelley Blue Book publishes millions of market-reflective values weekly on its top-rated website KBB.com, from its famous Blue Book® Trade-In Values to the Kelley Blue Book® Price Advisor tool, which offers a range for what consumers reasonably can expect to pay for a vehicle in their area. KBB.com editors rate and review hundreds of new vehicles each year to help consumers understand the [Best Cars](#) and [Best SUVs](#) to meet their needs. Kelley Blue BookSM Instant Cash Offer provides a redeemable trade-in offer to transaction-ready consumers and conveniently connects them to local participating dealers. Kelley Blue Book's Service Advisor provides guidance on how much to pay for service and repairs, allowing consumers to schedule service with local dealers on KBB.com. Kelley Blue Book also provides vehicle values to finance and insurance companies as well as governmental agencies. Kelley Blue Book is a Cox Automotive brand.

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