

# Promoting road safety in child care services

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*Kids and Traffic is an Early Childhood Road Safety Education Program which is an ongoing partnership between the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and Macquarie University. This article examines strategies for child care services to support families to promote children's safety in road traffic environments.*

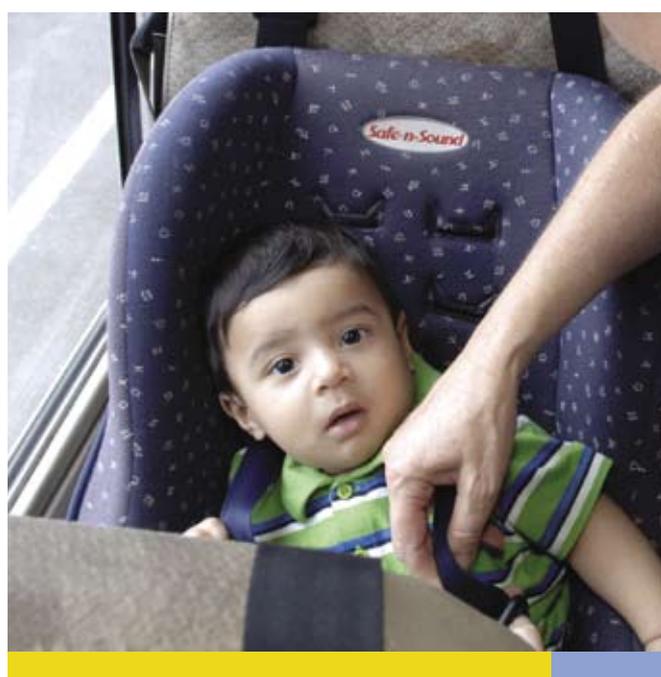
Traffic related injuries remain one of the leading, preventable causes of death and serious injury for young children. Driveways, car parks, unfenced yards, private roads and farms are particular danger areas. Sadly, many children under three are injured or killed in these off road areas, particularly by reversing vehicles.

## Active supervision by responsible adults is the key to protecting young children

The most critical times of the day for road safety in children's services occur during children's arrival and departure times. Greeting and farewelling children and their families are everyday routines in children's services. It can be easy to forget that these routines can present potentially life threatening risks for young children when safety is not considered carefully.

To promote road safety child care professionals can:

- encourage families to hold their children's hands or to hold them close to keep them safe when around vehicles.



### This article relates to:

**FDCQA Principles:** 3.1, 4.1 and 5.3

**OSHCQA Principle:** 7.2

**QIAS Principles:** 2.1, 2.2, 3.3, 4.1, 5.1 and 5.2

- talk with families about why effective barriers, fences and self-closing gates are important at the service and in other play areas, including the home environment
- remind families of how quickly young children can slip away unnoticed from an adult
- discuss ways of making sure all children are safe around traffic, including roads, driveways and car parks.

Child care services need to assess the potential road safety risks to children and adults in their environment, particularly during arrival and departure times. To minimise safety risks, services should develop written policies that identify effective supervision procedures and safety strategies such as:

- opening the gate is the responsibility of adults
- never let anyone else's child out of the premises
- never leave children alone in the car
- use the 'Safety Door' to get children in and out of the vehicle (the 'Safety Door' is the vehicle's rear door, away from the traffic).

Arrival and departure routines at the service provide a perfect opportunity for child care services to reinforce passenger safety, pedestrian safety and safe play messages with children and families. For example, child care professionals can display photographs of children and families arriving at the service safely by holding hands or by being buckled up in appropriate child restraints.

When children need to be transported between separate child care settings or outside school hours care environments, child care professionals must consider the safety of all transport arrangements used. For example, consider how children are supervised during transitions between settings and whether there are potential vehicle or pedestrian safety risks that need to be managed.

### **Keep children safe on excursions**

Excursions provide young children with the opportunity to practise walking safely with adults in real traffic environments. As adults and children explore their local neighbourhood together, they can talk about all the things they are doing to keep safe. While it will be many years before children can be safely independent in traffic, excursions can help children to recognise and practise essential life skills.

The best way to protect children near traffic is to hold their hands. *Kids and Traffic* recommends that all children hold an adult's hand during excursions. Child care professionals can also help keep children safe by:

- assessing risks in the traffic environment
- minimising the risks by choosing the safest route and location with the least traffic
- maintaining a high adult to child ratio.

### **Keep children safe as passengers by using correct child restraints**

There are significantly more children under four that are injured as passengers than as pedestrians or cyclists. The RTA recommends that children remain in an approved child restraint or booster seat until they are physically too big for it – i.e. when the child's eye level is above the back of the car seat. Moving children into adult seatbelts too early can place them at risk of serious injury. Services can promote passenger safety for children by communicating with families about the importance of focusing on children's physical size, rather than on their age, when making decisions regarding the most appropriate child restraints to use.

### **Communicate effectively with families to help keep children safe in the road traffic environment**

Sharing key road safety messages with families and encouraging them to use these empowers them with the knowledge to educate their children in real road traffic environments. Educating families about road safety helps children to receive consistent messages from both families and child care professionals. Road safety messages that may be shared with young children include:

- always hold a grown-up's hand
- always buckle up your seatbelt
- always wear your helmet when riding your bike or wheeled toy.

Encourage families to focus on what their children actually understand about road safety by listening carefully to what they say. Adults and children often use the same words, but children's understanding can be vastly different to the words they express. For example, a child may say 'I can cross the road safely' yet when they are asked how, they may say 'I don't know'. Even if they can say the words correctly, a child may not yet possess the skills to put their words into practice. It is important to remember that young children depend on adults to keep them safe in traffic.

A road safety sharing book for children and families to draw or write about their journeys to and from the service can be an effective way to encourage family participation.

### **Include road safety in everyday learning experiences**

Child care professionals can integrate road safety into many planned experiences for children. This can assist children to begin to develop an understanding of what they need to do to keep safe in the real road traffic environment.

Encourage children to make choices and construct their own learning about road safety through a variety of open-ended road safety resources and props. For example, chairs with stocking seatbelts and passenger dolls, a pedestrian crossing mat, a red/green man sign, dress-up clothes and pram can encourage children to role play their own journeys and how they keep safe when out and about with their families.

The *Kids and Traffic* website ([www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au](http://www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au)) offers ideas that assist child care professionals to plan meaningful road safety learning experiences for children. Child care professionals may find the website beneficial in addressing existing road safety issues in their service and local community, as well as reflecting the needs of children and families.

### **Develop and implement road safety policies to help ensure safe environments for children**

Information from the *Kids and Traffic* website may assist services to develop and/or review their road safety policy to cover issues such as:

- safety during travel and excursions
- using bikes and wheeled toys safely
- safe arrivals and departures
- road safety education
- pedestrian, driveway and passenger safety
- safe play ■

### **Further Information**

Kids and Traffic is a New South Wales organisation. Child care professionals and families in other states and territories should contact their relevant state or territory government department for information regarding road safety resources and appropriate child vehicle restraints.

The New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority provides links to other federal, state and territory road authority websites at (<http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/relatedwebsites.htm>).

The Australian Government Australian Transport Safety Bureau website has a list of publications and resources, many of which are free, that services can either order, or download online.

- Kids and Traffic ([www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au](http://www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au))
- Australian Transport Safety Bureau ([www.atsb.gov.au](http://www.atsb.gov.au))