

## Child in traffic

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It is important from a developmental viewpoint that a child may move safely in his/her immediate environment. To ensure this, both protection and guidance are needed.

Children can be protected by planning the traffic environment in such a way that it is safe for children; in addition, one must make sure that children use appropriate safety equipment. Furthermore, special attention should be given to childrens traffic education and communication - targeted at all road-users - regarding childrens qualities and behaviour in traffic. Traffic accidents are the single greatest cause of childrens accidental deaths.

### Childrens abilities develop gradually

A childs field of vision is narrower than that of an adult; therefore, it is more difficult for a child to observe complex traffic situations correctly. It may be

difficult for a child to hear where the sound of the car is coming from. A child is also hard pressed to estimate correctly how far an approaching car is and how fast it is travelling. As children are shorter than adults, seeing over parked cars, for instance, poses a problem. Similarly, a car driver may not see the child in between cars and bushes. Furthermore, traffic terms and symbols are often times too difficult to comprehend for a child.

Children play and are impulsive also in traffic. Attention may suddenly fix on a friend, for example, and traffic is forgotten for an instant as the child runs directly onto the road. As children lack the appropriate experience, they have no clear understanding of the dangers of traffic. Children often rely too much e.g. on drivers ability to stop in time.



### Local issues key in traffic education

The central principles of traffic education are locality, functionality and continuity.

A child learns from the model his/her parents provide. Parents should go over the childs travel routes together with the child and make sure that the child does not travel alone in an environment where he/she can not cope yet. The traffic education given by day-care and school supports the effort of the parents and adds continuity to it.

### Environment solutions make a difference

It is important for the development of children that they get to familiarise themselves with their immediate environment and gradually expand their horizons. Sufficient room for play must be reserved for children as well as ample opportunity to go safely in ones

immediate environment. Even if new residential areas are planned to be as safe as possible, it may turn out that the needs of children are not taken into consideration to a sufficient degree. Also, childrens safety can be improved in existing, already constructed areas. For instance, the location of zebra crossings, playgrounds and parking areas can be changed. In addition, light traffic lanes can be built, speed limits can be reduced and sight obstructions can be removed.

The environmental hazards of traffic should also be paid attention to, since children are especially vulnerable to traffic emissions. Everyone can influence the safety of ones own neighbourhood. As defects or shortcomings are observed, one should contact the municipal technical administration. An environment that is safe for children is enjoyable for others as well.

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## Use of safety equipment

Childrens safety equipment prevents and mitigates damages in an accident. While travelling in a car, one must make sure that children are appropriately secured in safety equipment that is in line with their weight and height. While bicycling, a bicycle helmet protects the childs head and the bicycle child seat prevents the childs feet from being hit by the bicycle spokes. When it comes to reflectors, fixed reflectors on childrens clothes are the most durable ones.

## Other road-users are crucial

Adults are responsible for childrens safety in traffic. They must take into account childrens prerequisites - which are only in their forming stages - and prepare also for unexpected situations. Sufficiently low driving speeds in residential areas and in the vicinity of day-care centres and schools help the drivers to notice children in due time and thus avoid dangerous situations.

## Road crossings the most dangerous

Children between the ages of 6 and 9 are injured in traffic as pedestrians and bicyclists. Annually their number is about 50. Especially the 6-9 years-olds have been in the pedestrians biggest risk group in addition to the elderly.

Out of those injured as bicyclists, 10-14 year-olds form the biggest risk group in comparison to different age groups.

Looking at sheer numbers, the most injuries to children under 15 befall them while the children are travelling in cars; about 300 accidents annually.

Usually serious accidents occur to children while they are crossing a street or a road. Normally accidents take place in the childs immediate environment, on home street. The most common season for children to end up in traffic accidents is summer.

## Childrens traffic accidents

During recent years, approximately 18 children under the age of 15 have perished in traffic annually. From the same age group, there are 700 children that get injured every year. Traffic accidents are common causes of death for children. In fact, traffic accidents cause the majority of childrens accidental deaths. Traffic accidents clearly surpass other causes of death such as drowning or fire.

Children under 15 perish in traffic mainly in three road-user groups: car passengers, pedestrians and bicyclists. Annually about ten children have died while travelling in cars; when viewed as pedestrians and cyclists, about four children die in each group, respectively. In addition, annually one or two moped drivers under 15 die in traffic.

A great share of childrens traffic accidents is left outside the statistics. Many traffic accidents which require hospital care or a visit to a healthcare centre are not included in the statistics, since only those childrens traffic accidents which come to the attention of the police are reported in official statistics.

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