

# **Re-packaging Youth Road Safety Messages**

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## **Abstract**

Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) is a participatory and interactive approach to helping young people develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills that will impact positively on their choices relating to risk acceptance. This presentation will focus on Youthsafe's development and implementation of a LSBE resource kit for educators and professionals working with young people, titled 'What's the Plan?' The kit primarily targets 15 -17 year olds and explores interconnected celebrating risks such as vehicle travel, alcohol and other drugs and peer relationship issues. It also offers realistic strategies and ways to develop skills to enhance risk perception and healthy responses to it.

## **Introduction**

Young drivers, passengers and pedestrians are not only at risk on the roads because they lack road user skills and experience but because they also need further support in developing self-protective and pro-social skills (Lonerio, 1999). Additionally, young drivers often find themselves new to both driving, carrying passengers and independently celebrating with peer age friends. A range of factors such as inexperience with driving, inexperience with alcohol and other drugs, driver fatigue, the influence of peers and driving at night, the most common times for both youth crashes, and common times for youth celebrations indicate a link between celebrations with peer age friends and increased crash risk.

Life Skills-Based Education is a participatory and interactive approach to helping young people develop the necessary skills and behaviours that positively impact on their choices relating to risk acceptance (UNICEF, 2002). By exploring and practising a range of complementary personal and social skills and values, participants are empowered to make positive, healthy choices and avoid risk within a range of celebrating contexts, including those involving vehicle travel, alcohol and other drugs and peer relationship issues.

### **Transport Issues and Minor Youth Celebrations**

While they are important for social development, youth celebrations can also introduce a range of factors to partying and post-party travel that increases the risk of serious injury to young people. Other factors that increase the risk of injury in young people include: new and increased levels of independence, inexperience with managing new and unfamiliar situations, experimentation with alcohol and other drugs, undeveloped skills in hazard perception, decision making and negotiation, vulnerability to peer influence, overconfidence and sensation-seeking tendencies (Youthsafe, 2004).

Youthsafe's research has also revealed that due to the frequently spontaneous, unsupervised and unplanned nature of minor celebrations, young people are at greater risk of injury during these types of celebrations (Youthsafe, 2006). These are smaller, local or neighbourhood events and activities that often have a primary focus on alcohol and drug consumption and frequently occur in locations such as parks, beaches, riversides and private homes which offer limited safe transport options. Additionally, the injury risks associated with minor celebrations may not be understood or accepted, let alone adequately planned for and managed.

Driving is therefore both exciting and risky for young people and is often a central aspect of adolescent social activities. NSW research has confirmed young drivers tend to drive in risky conditions more often than experienced drivers, for example, on weekends, at night and with peers in recreational circumstances (Lam, 2003). Minor celebrations thus increase the potential for motor vehicle crashes involving young drivers, passengers and pedestrians.

Young drivers have a greater risk of involvement in a fatal crash if they have two or more passengers. Of the 89 young drivers involved in fatal crashes from 2001 to 2003, 36 per cent were driving with two or more passengers. This contrasts with 15 per cent for drivers aged 26 and over. (NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, 2003)

The involvement of young drivers in late night and early morning fatal crashes is significantly higher than that of older drivers (RTA, 2003; Lam, 2003). Of the 96 P plate drivers aged under 26 who were involved in fatal crashes from 2001 to 2003, 33% crashed between 10pm and 5am. This compared with 14% of drivers aged 26 years and over. Young drivers with a P licence are six times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash between 10pm and 5am than other drivers. The over-involvement of young drivers is highest on Friday and Saturday nights. However, young drivers are also over-represented on other nights of the week. (NSW RTA, 2003) In NSW, fatigue was found to increase the risk of a casualty crash by more than twice for all young drivers irrespective of licence status (Lam, 2003).

Further, when young people drink alcohol, their inexperience with both driving and alcohol greatly increases their risk of crashing. In 2002, approximately 23% of fatal crashes in the 17-20 year age group were attributed to blood alcohol content (NSW RTA, 2003). P-plate zero alcohol restriction means they may still be over the legal limit and affected by alcohol the day after drinking. Alcohol use has been repeatedly identified as a major contributor to road-related morbidity and mortality. Data from the Federal Office of Road Safety indicates that intoxication was implicated in 42% of deaths in adult and youth pedestrians in Australia in 1997, and that intoxicated passengers were twice as likely as sober passengers to leave their seat belt off (FORS, 1999).

### **Life Skills Based Education**

Life Skills Based Education is a pedagogical model for health and social education promoted by global organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation. The foundation of this pedagogy is based on a wide body of theory-based research strongly influenced by Social Learning

Theory (Bandura, 1977). Social Learning Theory focuses on the necessity of providing children and young people with methods or skills for coping with internal aspects of their social lives.

The primary goal of skills-based education is to change not only a young person's level of knowledge, but to enhance his or her ability to translate that knowledge into specific, positive behaviours. Participatory, interactive teaching and learning methods are critical components of this type of education as these replicate the natural processes by which children and young people learn behaviour (Mangrulkar, Whitman, Posner, 2001). These methods include role plays, debates, situation analysis, and small group work. It is through their participation in learning activities that use these methods that young people learn how to better manage themselves, their relationships, and their health decisions. In addition, many examples from educational and behavioural research show that retention of these behaviours can be enhanced by rehearsal (Bandura, 1977; Mangrulkar, Whitman, Posner, 2001).

It is now widely recognized that for individuals to choose, adopt and maintain behaviours that preserve and promote health, knowledge alone is generally not sufficient. Especially when there are temptations, pressures, pleasure or rewards associated with doing things that are unhealthy—like driving dangerously, binge drinking or using drugs—individuals need to know more than just what is in their best interests. They also need to be motivated to do (or not do) what is necessary to protect their interests and finally, to be capable of doing it. To make all this possible, skills-based health education seeks to help individuals develop a combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills (UNESCO).

The skills referred to include practical skills, such as how to organise safe transport home, negotiating a formal back-up plan with a responsible adult, or how to refuse a lift with an alcohol-affected driver. They also include life skills, which the World Health Organization defines as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO). These are a group of cognitive,

personal and interpersonal abilities that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner (UNESCO). By teaching young people *how* to think rather than *what* to think, by providing them with the tools for solving problems, making decisions and managing emotions, and by engaging them through participative methodologies, skills development can become a means of empowerment (Mangrulkar, Whitman, Posner, 2001).

South Australian (Wooley, 2000) and Canadian (Loner, 1999) researchers have also identified the potential of holistic road safety education/training programs to create positive road safety benefits. This would be achieved by generating support for sharing of safer lifestyles, integration of road safety issues into school subjects in areas of social values, risk taking and peer pressure and development of media to enhance perceptual and decision making skills (Senserrick and Haworth, 2005). Research on young drivers has also suggested that training in cognitive-perceptual skills that includes processing information from a social perspective allows the influences and constraints placed on that information processing in relation to driving behaviour to be explored (Groegar, 2002). Further, to achieve balance between the demands of non-driving and driving tasks and skills while avoiding overconfidence and overestimation of skills, this training must also take into account both the motivational orientations and the aptitude of the driver (Hatakka, Keskinen, Gregersen, Glad, & Hernetkoski, 2002).

### **What's the Plan?**

'What's the Plan?' is a resource kit for educators who want to help young people successfully manage serious injury risk and adopt safe celebrating behaviours. The kit's title reflects the resource's key themes of the benefits of planning youth celebrations and the consequences of failing to adequately do so. The primary target audience for 'What's the Plan?' are "minors" aged approximately 15 – 17, in non-traditional school and community educational

settings. The secondary target audience are students in Years 10-12 attending secondary schools.

For young people, 'What's the Plan?' offers LSBE techniques that are inclusive, interactive, age and gender appropriate, with empowering and affirming messages and images. Specifically, the kit aims to support young people in developing positive knowledge, attitudes and skills towards safe celebrating behaviour by exploring and reinforcing:

- The importance of celebrations with family and friends as a normal part of growing up
- The dangerous risks associated with unplanned and poorly / unsupervised minor celebrations held in homes, beaches, parks, public spaces, etc.
- The risks to novice drivers and their passengers associated with inexperience, speeding, overcrowding, drink/drugged driving, fatigue, and peer influence
- The benefits of non-driving options while celebrating
- The responsibilities of party organisers
- The importance of looking out for the safety and wellbeing of yourself and your friends while celebrating
- The benefits of pre-planning celebrations and safe transport home
- The benefits of having a strategy to set personal limits and cope with negative peer influence
- The consequences of failing to manage injury risks while celebrating with same age peers.
- Realistic strategies and skills to promote safe behaviour and reject dangerous risks

For educators, 'What's the Plan?' provides a broad range of resources and support material to assist them in presenting evidence-based safe celebrating information and strategies in an engaging, innovative and youth-friendly way. 'What's the Plan's' flexible timing and delivery format has been designed to be

used in a range of contexts and settings. Educators could choose, for example, to dovetail the sessions and activities within their individual programs or to facilitate a distinct unit on safe celebrating. There are additional learning activities to support educators adapt sessions for students with special learning needs. This gives educators the freedom to use it in the way that is most appropriate for the young people they are working with.

### **What is in the kit?**

- Scenarios depicting seven youth celebrations, focusing on driver, passenger and pedestrian injury risks as well as those associated with alcohol and other drugs.
- Session plans focusing on: positive and realistic safe celebrating strategies; identifying and managing negative peer influence; creating and negotiating an adult/youth agreement
- Downloadable comic strips showing each of the DVD characters putting their safe celebrating strategies into action – designed to appeal to a youth audience and also assist educators working with young people with special learning needs.
- Fact sheets, detailed educators' notes and links to websites containing additional resources and information for educators.

### **Additional Youthsafe Safe Celebrating Resources**

As part of Youthsafe's multi-strategic approach to youth injury prevention, the 'What's the Plan?' kit complements a range of additional safe celebrating resources such as postcards and wristbands for young people; fact sheets on safe celebrating and young drivers for parents and carers; sample copies of adult-youth agreements for parents and carers; the Safe Celebrating Guide, the Youth Consultation Guide and the Safe Celebrating Discussion Paper for professionals working with young people.

### **Conclusion**

Adolescence is by nature a time when young people are more open and amenable to ideas and change but also to accepting levels of risk that make

them vulnerable to serious injury. Hence, during this transitory period of their lives, LSBE offers young people social, cognitive and emotional coping tools to help them recognise the injury risks within their celebrations with peer age friends and assist them in avoiding or managing those risks. Embedding road safety education within a LSBE program therefore allows young people to apply those skills not only to their travel but to their specific celebrating contexts.

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