



SHARING THE MESSAGE: COMMUNICATING ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION WITH FAMILIES

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Families and early childhood educators share one very important goal – the safety and wellbeing of their young children. Our views may differ on many other aspects of a child's experience at kindergarten but on the need to keep children safe we find ourselves in strong agreement. So as hundreds of children and families are welcomed into early childhood education and care services, it is timely to think about how we can work with families to ensure children remain safe as they learn about themselves and the world around them.

There are, of course, many aspects of children's safety that educators will feature as part of a quality educational program. Children will most likely learn about how to safely climb equipment, be safe in the sun and how to safely approach a dog in a park. But there is one aspect of safety that children have the opportunity to learn in early childhood that affects both children and adults and has a lasting impact on the safety of our whole

community – road safety education. Road safety education responds to the fact that road-related incidents involving children remain one of the leading causes of injury or death for young children and that national road tolls are on the rise. In an increasingly mobile society where children are, from birth, road users (as passengers, pedestrian or cyclist) road safety education teaches children to be safe and responsible on our roads now and into the future.

In response to this evidence, there are now many early childhood services that routinely include the *Starting Out Safely* road safety education program as part of the curriculum. Children are supported to learn about the key road safety messages and practice these skills as they participate in community life. But how do we engage families in this important work?

As part of our commitment to safety and in response to the recently articulated themes defining exceeding practice in the National Quality Standard, it is imperative that educators find meaningful ways to extend their commitment to road safety education to include communication with and support of families to implement safe road use habits. This is best achieved when educators use multiple strategies over a period of time. Token or 'one-off'

efforts seldom translate into daily habits compared to regular reminders that are relevant to families lives. The following suggestions support educators to not only communicate with families but also work with them to promote road safety in home and communities.

- As a first step, educators could consider the context of the community. What are the road safety challenges or issues that families might experience? For example, having to navigate a very busy intersection to access the centre or a small car park shared with another service or a community where children never see footpaths or traffic lights. Perhaps ask the families what they consider to be the challenges on the roads in the local community and what they would like their children to learn about and include these in the curriculum.
- Articulate the commitment of the service to safety in the policies and information provided to families not only when they are at the centre but also on their way to and from the centre and when they are at home. Resources to support policy development, as well as sample policies are available at the *Starting Out Safely* website childroadsafety.org.au.

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- Distribute road safety educational materials in the information or welcome pack. These are produced by VicRoads and available to order on the *Starting Out Safely* website. Educators might also consider including specific road safety information relevant to the centre and the local community in the family handbook.
- Include a question in the interview with families about their understanding of road safety and whether they have any concerns or questions about their child's understanding. For example, families might identify that it's hard to get their children to sit in a child restraint or hold their hand as they are walking. These insights might alert you to any gaps in understanding about road safety and assist in decisions about what might be included in the curriculum.
- As information is shared about the curriculum, perhaps at an information night or welcome event, discuss how the program will include teaching children about safety including road safety and why this is important.
- Use signage to remind families about the key safety messages, for example, holding their children's hands and use the safety door as they depart. Encourage children to also share this information with families. Consider

developing signage, with the support of a willing parent volunteer, in relevant community languages as a way of promoting safety messages in accessible ways.

- When planning outings into the community – a practice increasingly featured in quality curriculum decisions – invite families to come along. Not only will this be an opportunity for parents to learn how children connect to and contribute to their communities but also how to keep children safe as they venture out into the streets.

- If the service receives a visit from ThingleToodle this year consider inviting the families – the performance is just as funny for grown-ups with some great safety messages!
- Check out the latest road safety materials and resources on the *Starting Out Safely* childroadsafety.org.au.

Together, educators and families can make a significant difference in the safety of young children on our roads. To paraphrase a well-used saying – it takes a village to raise children safely and that same village to teach safe road use habits!



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