



VARA KOMMUN

Children's righteous demands for road safety

O.Ro.S (Observatory for the Road Safety)
URB-AL



Preface

Vara municipality is situated on the wide plains in the centre of Västergötland in south western Sweden. The municipality has some 16 000 inhabitants and covers more than 700 square kilometres. Fifty percent of the population live in one of the nine densely populated areas, the other fifty in purely rural areas. Farming still forms a great part of the local trade but a prosperous and world-wide industry has also been created. A total of 700 companies are active in Vara municipality.

In 2000 Vara municipality supported by the National Road Administration started a project on road safety and the environment (MÖTS). The successful methods developed in the project were part of the reason why Vara municipality was awarded the Gold Triangle by the National Society for Road Safety in 2004. This is a piece of evidence that Vara is one of the best Swedish municipalities in the field of road safety. Sweden is one among the leading countries in road safety internationally. The Gold Triangle ought to be a warrant that the road safety efforts performed by Vara municipality are among the best also in an international comparison.

Vara municipality is part of the EU project O.Ro.S., "Observatory for the Road Safety", in the EU programme URB-AL. The project's major aim is to improve quality of life, mobility and road safety in cities by measures that:

- To improve awareness of population in the field of road safety
- To improve awareness and competencies of children and young people
- To improve urban / territory planning and infrastructures projecting; to create and test a model of Safe Territory Certification
- To develop and disseminate the good practices concerning Safety and Mobility Management and new technologies for vehicles
- To train operators and technicians
- To create networks local among decision makers, Ngo's and operators
- To establish a Virtual Observatory for Road Safety conceived as a tool for durable co-operation at international level and as an instrument for updating and exchange of information, knowledge, experiences and good practices.

Vara municipality is responsible for the area of "Children's rights to road safety, background, present position and teaching methods". This document is a synthesis of experience and knowledge of the needs of children and their rights to road safety, from their time as unborn babies to the day when they may apply for a driver's licence. The background has been collected from a number of documents and websites accounted for in the References.

At an earlier stage Vara municipality took part in the EU project Vi.Co.Ro.Sa, a forerunner of URB-AL.

Vara municipality in November 2005

Jan-Erik Wallin, Chairman of the Municipal Executive Committee

Contents

Summary 1
Children live dangerously on the roads..... 3
Unborn babies 5
In the car..... 6
On the bike 9
Places for playing activities..... 11
Safe school roads..... 13
On the moped 16
Alcohol and drugs 18
A driving licence of your own..... 20
References 21

Summary

For children and the young, road accidents are the most common single cause of death as far as accidents are concerned.

Guidelines for road safety efforts in Sweden have been established by the Swedish Parliament's decision on the Vision Zero in autumn 1997. Safe roads according to Vision Zero implies that no one should be killed or seriously injured in a road accident. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child focuses on the needs of the child and pays special attention to the child's vulnerability and exposed position.

To make safety measures concerning the roads to school successful, close cooperation with the surrounding society is required. The school children must be provided with knowledge and insights into the makings of society and how the traffic system works.

The safety belt offers the best possible protection for pregnant women and their unborn babies. In Sweden the law makes it mandatory for every car passenger to use the belt. According to the law, children under seven must use a special protective device. It is not until the age of 10-12 that children can be safely carried in cars with belts in the same way as adults. Until the age of 4 children are best protected by forward-facing positions.

Riding a bike is a healthy and good mode of transport for children. Unfortunately, children on bikes are exposed to risks. The best protection is a bicycle helmet. Much has been gained in the field of road safety by separating bikes and motor traffic through special lanes for bikes.

Children's needs to play out-of-doors are well documented. If they are not allowed to move spontaneously in the near surroundings, learning and development are hampered. At present motor traffic close to where children move about creates the most serious restrictions in children's outdoor playing activities.

In Sweden the number of children being carried to school by their parents is on the increase. The traffic environment outside the school building is often troublesome. The fact that children are carried also adds negatively to their health - they get less physical exercise.

Riding a moped has lately become increasingly popular in Sweden and the numbers of injured and dead have gone up. Most moped accidents are one-vehicle accidents where the moped riders fall off or run into some solid obstacle. Using a helmet is a simple and economical way of reducing the risk of serious injuries.

Alcohol and drugs are extremely high risk factors in traffic. Drunken drivers come from mainly three groups in society: young people in the ages of 18-25, criminals and abusers.

Young car drivers are unfortunately very much over-represented in accident statistics. Young drivers' accidents are mostly due to lack of experience. In addition, there are high speeds or the driver might be under the influence of drink. Very many young drivers also cannot be bothered to use protection such as safety belts.

Many different parties in society could help to increase road safety for children. Children and the young themselves are of course an important group with power to influence things. Other important groups are:

- parents
- maternity centres
- school
- architects and community planners
- the car, bicycle, moped and taxi organisations

Children live dangerously on the roads

For children and the young, road accidents are the most common single cause of death as far as accidents are concerned.

Children cannot cope with the demands of traffic in the same way as adults. They are shorter, have a limited field of vision, their stereo hearing is not fully developed and they have difficulties judging speeds and distances. Children also act on impulse and are not mature enough to cope with traffic situations until the age of twelve. Driving a moped means an increased risk for teenagers of getting injured or killed on the road. Alcohol and drugs also add to young people being exposed in traffic situations.

Most children and young people live in densely populated areas where motor traffic is the dominating source of emission of health endangering substances.

The Vision Zero – foundation of Swedish road safety policies

Swedish guidelines for road safety were established by a decision in the Swedish Parliament in autumn 1997 on the Vision Zero. According to the Vision, safe roads mean that not a single person is to be killed or seriously injured in a road accident.

Vision Zero is based on insights like the one that people sometimes make mistakes and because of this road accidents could not be completely prevented. But you could stop accidents from leading to death or serious personal injuries.

Road safety activities are about preventing accidents and eliminating or reducing personal injuries in the accidents that in fact occur.

Vision Zero takes a different view of responsibilities in road safety as shared by those who design and manage the road traffic system and the users. Road maintenance organisations (the Swedish National Road Administration and the municipalities), the car industry and the police are examples of traffic system managers. Complying with the traffic regulations is part of the responsibility of the road users.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Sweden ratified the UN convention according to a decision in the Swedish Parliament on 21st June, 1990.

The UN convention focuses on the needs of the child and pays special attention to the child's vulnerability and exposed position. The child's right to life and development is part of the fundamental principles of the convention.

To guarantee the child's rights according to the convention, a combination of measures is required such as legislation. Other measures could be creating effective means of governing, opinions and information.

In the strategy of the Swedish Parliament to implement the convention it is stated, that the influence and participation of children and young people should be allowed to increase in matters of social planning and road traffic planning.

Strategies for better public health

In an unsafe traffic environment it is more common for parents to drive their children to school or recreation activities. In this way children and young people get less

exercise and their physical health shows several negative trends. An increasing number of children get too little exercise and suffer from overweight. Diabetes and back problems begin to develop at earlier ages.

Participation and influence in society are among the most fundamental requirements for public health. This has been laid down in the Swedish national aims for public health. Special importance should be given to the needs of children and the young.

The importance of long-term efforts of a wide range

Changing behaviours is difficult. It is because of this important to work with long-term strategies. Changes in road traffic behaviours could not be expected after only a few years. Lasting development requires lasting efforts.

Intense campaigns could result in changed behaviours in the short term, people become more aware of their habits and discover ways of changing them. But when the campaign is over there is a great risk that many return to their old habits. Repetition and continuity are necessary. People concerned need to be involved and a confidence-inspiring relationship has to be established.

School plays an important part

Over the years, the community has spent large resources on road traffic training and road safety information in the schools. The overall idea was to train and adapt children to road traffic. But results have not been as expected. Investigations show, that teachers and school children display a lack of interest in the teaching on traffic regulations, road signs and traffic behaviour training. This is probably one reason why road traffic training has not been made an integrated part of school subjects or thematic studies. It has more often been seen as a matter for special experts.

To make efforts at school, dealing with road traffic issues successful, close cooperation with the surrounding community is needed, mainly with parents and societies, local police, planning authorities, politicians and others.

The children must be given knowledge and insights on the makings of society and in what way the traffic system works. It is only then that school children are able to, would like to and dare take part in the attempts of creating change in society. It means giving school children a proper opportunity to influence road safety to the better.

Unborn babies

In the case of accidents, motor vehicle accidents are most frequent in causing pregnant women to turn to hospitals for emergency care. For unborn babies, motor accidents are most often involved in fatal accidents.

The safety belt is the best protection for pregnant women and unborn babies. There are no other special car safety devices for unborn babies. Other products offer the pregnant mother added comfort in the car if she cannot adapt the safety belt across her lap in a satisfactory way.

Mementoes for parents-to-be

Pregnant women should always use the safety belt. The most important thing is that the lap belt is placed below her abdomen, across her pelvic region, so as not to squeeze the baby.

Fittings that help keeping the lap belt in place under the abdomen could be rented or obtained from certain specialist shops.

Women are well advised to avoid driving in the last period preceding childbirth. In case of an accident the steering-wheel as well as possible airbags could harm the baby. The woman is better protected in a passenger seat.

Mementos for maternity care centres

Parents-to-be are often open to information on security for their babies. There are a number of questions and this period could be very useful for creating in the parents a fundamental understanding of safety for their child in traffic environments. They should be informed of what parents can do to minimize risks for the unborn child and in what way small children should be placed and belted in the car.

Mementos for the car industry

As yet knowledge of the risks for pregnant women and unborn babies is fairly low. Car manufacturers could add to such knowledge through research and development. They could also inform their customers on the safest way of car transport for pregnant women.

In the car

In Sweden the law states that the use of belts in cars is mandatory and children under 7 must have special protection.

Until the age of 4, children are best protected in the car in a rear-ward facing baby seat. The child's head is big and heavy in comparison with the body. The neck is fragile. In case of an accident, the head is thrown violently forward and backward. Extra support in the car is required if the child is to endure this kind of violence. A chair facing rear-ward absorbs the violent powers and protect the child's fragile head and neck. The risks of the small child being killed or severely injured are five times greater in a forward-facing seat than one facing rear-ward.

It is not until the age of 10-12 that children can be safely carried in cars with belts in the same way as adults. At earlier ages they should be protected by special arrangements, child car seats, a booster seat or a booster pillow.

Mementos for parents

Children should never use seats fitted with airbags. This is true for anyone shorter than 140 cms. The released power could be devastating. So baby protection devices, child car seats or booster cushions should never be used in seats with airbags. Turn to a dealer's workshop if an airbag is to be removed. There is little risk of damage from a side airbag to a child correctly placed in a seat with baby protection or in a rear-ward facing seat.

When "only" going a short distance, such as to the nursery, the shop or somewhere close, many children are probably carried unbelted. No harm is meant and many adults probably consider the risks for the child to be minimal, since the distance is so short and the speed low. Unfortunately reality proves otherwise. Most children killed in road accidents are killed in so-called short transports.

Baby protection devices, child car seats, booster seats/booster cushions should be made to fit both the car and the child. Use specialist dealers whose trained staff can offer correct information and assistance to try out the child's seat. Make sure that the seat is approved and marked with a T or an E. Follow instructions carefully.

It is all right to buy second-hand protective equipment but preferably not older than ten years. There should be no visible defects. Be careful that the equipment is approved and comes with a complete assembly instruction.

Make sure that the children are safely belted before starting the car. The tighter the belt fits , the safer. To be sure – check the belt an extra time.

Choose a safe car. Car manufacturers have lately developed considerably safer models. Often old big cars are less safe than small modern cars.

When ordering a taxi remember to mention that you want it to be equipped with a baby protection device, a child car seat, booster seat or booster cushion.

0 to 9 months – baby protection

The baby protection device should be the proper size. The baby should be allowed to rest firmly and comfortably, with all of its head protected. As the baby grows you may have to change into a larger model.

The baby protection device is placed back-to-front in the front or rear. With only one adult in the car it will probably feel safer to have the baby beside you in the front. If there are two adults it is safer to place the baby and one adult in the rear.

Baby cots and protective nets for infant carriers do not give sufficient protection. If you choose this solution, the baby's head should be placed towards the centre of the car.

7 months to the age of four – back-to-front seat

When the baby is able to sit on its own it is time to change into a child car seat. It should be mounted back-to-front in the front or rear of the car. In the front the seat could rest against the instrument panel (never against the windscreen). In the rear it rests against the back of the front seat (check that the seat is approved for the rear). There are many models, follow the instructions carefully.

Children should ride back-to-front as long as possible. The seat is outgrown when the top of the child's head is higher than the top of the seat or the weight limit has been exceeded. It is then probably necessary to change into a larger rear-ward facing model.

Some child car seats are approved to be used facing forward. In this case the safety belt and its attaching bolts are often removed. If so, a booster seat/ booster cushion firmly enclosing the child's hips and thighs is a safer choice.

4 years to 10-12 years – a belted seat/belted cushion

Children should use a booster seat or booster cushion until the age of 10-12 years. As long as their bone structure is not fully developed the child needs an uplifted position for the belt to protect its body.

Assist the child in applying the safety belt correctly – close to the neck, across the breastbone and across the lap (not the stomach). The tighter it fits around the body, the better the protection. Try to unbutton thick outer garments and place the belt across the lap beneath the clothes. Never allow the belt to be fitted under the child's arms.

The booster seat differs from the booster cushion mainly in the high back support. If the child is placed in a seat without a headrest, the booster seat is to be preferred. The seat also helps to keep the belt in place when the child is asleep.

Mementos for the car industry

Inform the car owners on how children could ride safely in the car. Make it simple for families with children to have an airbag removed to fit in a seat for a child. Make the fitting of baby protection devices and rear-ward facing seats a simple procedure and offer protective devices for children that are specially created for your car models.

Mementos for taxi drivers

Always use baby protection, rear-ward facing seats, booster seats or booster cushions when carrying children. Do not allow parents to place the child on their lap even for a short ride. Refuse the fare if you cannot meet with these precautions, mainly for the sake of the child.

On the bike

Riding a bike is a healthy and good mode of transport for children. For smaller children riding a bike is a mixture of cycling and playing. Older children and young people increase their freedom of movement on the roads by riding bikes. Unfortunately children on bikes are also exposed to risks. The bicycle helmet is the most important protective device for bikers.

The law in Sweden says that bicycle helmets are mandatory for the young under the age of 15, whether riding the bike or being carried on a bike or in a bicycle cart. The law is in force for the use of a bike even in fenced-in areas. Adults or young people over 15 carrying a child are responsible for their passengers and that they wear helmets. A person carrying a helmet-less child violates the law and is liable to a fine.

An infant helmet is recommended for children up to the age of 7. The helmet is also recommended for playing activities and has a green buckle (and/or green chin strap). The buckle is made so as to open up when exposed to certain strain if the child gets stuck and risks being injured by the helmet. Bicycle helmets for adults have straps and buckles standing up even to greater strain. This design has proved very risky for small children since they often leave their bikes to play or climb trees, still wearing their helmets.

There have been great gains in road safety for cyclists by setting up special bicycle lanes separating bikes and cars. In Sweden eight out of ten bicycle accidents occur without cars being involved. Most often the person riding the bike is thrown over, runs into other cyclists or pedestrians. Unfortunately it is fairly common for children to get hurt since some part of the bike comes loose and gets into the wheel.

Mementos for parents

Children should always use their bicycle helmets. There are models for everyone riding a bike and for every size head, but it is important to choose a helmet that fits your child. The most important thing to look for is the CE label and the fact that the helmet fits. It should fit tightly so that it cannot fall off or be shoved back to leave the forehead unprotected. Do not buy a helmet that is too big in the hope that the child will grow into it.

A helmet that has been knocked about should be exchanged. Set a good example by using a helmet yourself. Younger children, up to the age of seven, should use an infant helmet with the green buckle.

At the age of one-and-a-half the child could usually use a three-wheeler. Go for a solid and steady three-wheeler – test it by swaying it sideways. If it falls over easily, it is not safe enough for your child.

At the age of 5/6 the child is enough grown-up for a proper bike. Let the child try out a correct size. Consider the following points when buying the child a bike:

- Do not buy a bike with a supporting wheel. If you do, the child will easily reach high speeds and risk severe injuries. The supporting wheel also makes the child lean over in the wrong direction turning corners, and this might lead to difficulties once it is removed.

- Small children must be able to reach the ground with both feet when sitting on the bike. When children get to school age and are more used to cycling, reaching down with one foot is enough.
- The child's first bike should have foot breaks. Leave things like gears and hand brakes for the time being – it is difficult enough for the child to keep its balance, steer and brake.
- The bike should have lights in front and at the rear, reflexes in front, rear and on the side of the tyres, a theft proof lock, a bell and chain protection. When the first bike with handbrakes is purchased, the brake handle must be of the right size for the child's hand.

Mementos for architects and community planners

It does not only the responsibility of the cyclist if the bicycle tour is to be safe. Measures by road maintainers such as the National Road Administration and the municipalities to improve roads also have an influence. A common measure to increase safety for cyclists is to separate cars from cyclists and pedestrians. This is done by creating separate paths for pedestrians and cyclists in densely populated areas and along main roads. Another method is to lower the speed limits to 30 kms/hour on roads and streets used by pedestrians, cyclists and cars.

Road safety could be improved for cyclists by narrowing lanes for motor vehicles in places where cyclists have to cross. Another measure is to create fly-over junctions for cyclists and motorists. Solid objects close to the bicycle lane could be removed or screened off which might lead to fewer injuries in one-person accidents.

Mementos for school authorities

Exercising, moving about is good for children. Schools could add to better health for children by taking an interest, making it attractive for children to use their bikes going to school.

When the bicycle season begins, it is also time to bring up the subject of bicycle helmets and why they should use them. Special days for servicing the children's bikes could also be arranged at the school, perhaps with special offers on helmets involving the local dealer.

In case there are no good bicycle lanes to the school school, school authorities could influence the road maintainers (usually the municipality) to arrange for more and better lanes.

The school authorities could offer good and safe parking lots for bikes near the school building.

Mementos for bicycle manufacturers/dealers

Inform the buyer of safe bikes and fittings such as helmets and lamps and of bike maintenance.

Develop safe bikes adapted to children's abilities at various ages. Small children should always have foot brakes. Don't sell over-large bikes to small children even if the parents seem to want a bike for "growing into". Develop and market good helmets that are also trendy and flattering.

Places for playing activities

The need for an out-of-door environment suitable for children's plays is well documented. Children's sensory, motor learning, emotional, social and cognitive abilities are developed through playing. When children are in a position to observe, examine and test things in their own surroundings they learn about the world around them and their own abilities. If they are not allowed to move freely in the near surroundings, their learning and development capacity is hampered. By introducing cars into the children's playing territory their environment narrows, Heavily trafficked environments have an effect on children's activity pattern.

Some generations ago children had a lot more freedom to explore their environment. Today motor traffic in the near surroundings is the most important factor creating restrictions in children's outdoor playing. Parents feel obliged to watch more closely over their children and for a greater part of their childhood. The fact that children have lost their independent freedom of movement is a threat to their quality of life.

Governments that have endorsed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, such as Sweden, acknowledge the child's rights to rest and leisure, play and recreation suitable to the child's age. The convention underlines the child's right to "enjoy the best possible health". From this point of view too, motor traffic in the child's near environment is a risk factor. Clear connections have been established between asthma and increased air pollution. Other studies have shown relationships between motor traffic pollution and cancer.

The major responsibility for the local community's environment and safety rests with the municipality, but school authorities, the parents and other parties involved with road traffic and the environment could also help to create more safe and secure surroundings for the children.

Mementos for parents

Most parents are worried that their children will meet with a road accident. Parents set up barriers for the children's freedom of movement. Since restrictions set up by parents is of major importance for children's use of their environment, this kind of measure is decisive for their development of spatial perception and action.

Parents can influence road maintenance authorities in charge of streets and roads. The municipality is often in charge in densely populated areas and the National Road Administration handles rural areas. If you live in a block of flats, the appropriate authority may be the landlord or the co-operative flat association.

A good policy is to work in groups with other parents or neighbours. Information is collected as a basis for contacts with the road maintenance authority, problem areas are documented with sketches and snap-shots. It might also be of interest to point out the number of vehicles on a certain road and how many drive too fast. Think of possible solutions.

Inform others in the area, such as the co-operative flat association, the community or the road association of your suggestions and proposed activities. Set up a document to the road maintenance authority stating your problem. It is important to be clear, to

offer the necessary facts and to point out deficiencies in the traffic environment. It is also positive if you could suggest possible solutions.

Follow-up your first document to the road maintenance authority. Find out who is in charge of the document and when it is going to be discussed. Sometimes contacts with local politicians are useful to learn about their views on road safety in the local community. Contacts with local media may also be fruitful, telling them about what you are trying to achieve.

Mementos for architects and community planners

Children's rights to a good and safe environment are well substantiated in society's overall objectives. It is however not altogether certain that they are observed when new housing areas are set up or old ones re-equipped, when places of work are designed and located or when new areas for games and adventure are created. Children and young people (0-18 years) make up one fourth of the population and their interests should be looked after considerably better in planning processes.

The local authority has the overall responsibility for children's freedom of movement and safety in the near surroundings. Local authorities can adopt action programmes stating the aims and direction of road safety activities for children and the young. With such action programmes as a starting-point, the chances improve that the safety of children will be considered in the process of designing road environments close to housing areas, schools, preschools, leisure centres, sports centres, libraries, etc.

It is also important to arrange all areas in the near surroundings to improve children's opportunities to move about on their own instead of being driven and accompanied. For young people it may be all important for their independent use of the environment in what way public transport is arranged including bus stops, regular traffic routes and time-tables. Especially in sparsely populated areas, public transport is central to the opportunities of going on your own to see a friend or to some leisure activity.

Mementos for the school

Many school playgrounds are still bare, windy and unpleasant. Sometimes they are nothing but a space of tarmac, a bicycle stand and a narrow flowerbed near the school building. Motor traffic is sometimes permitted in schoolyards. Refuse collection and food transports might be allowed in the schoolyard in school hours. It is often used as a parking lot. Situations like these could create a number of problems for the children, their freedom of movement and safety in the schoolyard.

Motor traffic in the part of the school grounds planned for the pupils should not be allowed in school hours. Access to fuel tanks, refuse room, offices and storerooms should be separated from other entries to the school area.

Safe school roads

There is a clear trend in Sweden that the number of children being carried to school and home by their parents increases. The traffic environment around many schools is troublesome. The large number of vehicles in the same place at the same time creates traffic hazards and increases emission of unhealthy substances effecting the children.

Children being carried also means that their health is impaired due to less physical activity. It effects their attitude to cars which is then difficult to change later in life. The movement pattern of an individual is learnt to 90 percent before the age of 13.

With more cars and buses on the move around schools the risk of a serious road accidents increases. The increasing number of cars make more parents feel that the road to school is hazardous. Because of this they will more often want to take the children in the car, which in turn results in even more cars and an aggravated situation.

The risk of Swedish school children being injured or killed is 50 percent higher on schooldays than other days. Two thirds of the distance on roads with motor traffic that school children travel on school days are spent on transport to and from school. Children in upper-compulsory schools run the highest risk since they are to a much larger extent unprotected road users.

All studies show that getting off the bus or crossing the road are the most serious road safety problems for children on their way to school.

Increased distances between pedestrians/ cyclists and road traffic is very effective to lower the danger of being exposed to exhaust fumes. With greater distances, traffic emissions diminish very rapidly. It is particularly important not to expose children on bikes or walking to high concentrations of pollution, as they take in more air when they are physically active. They are also more sensitive as growing individuals.

The law orders Swedish municipalities to arrange school transports free of cost if necessary because of distance, traffic environments, disabilities or other special circumstances.

Mementos for parents

Especially in the mornings, dense traffic around schools constitutes a traffic hazard for children.

Children who walk to school instead of being driven by car get daily exercise, are more alert and find it easier to concentrate. Studies show clear connections between physical activity and average grades.

Cars emit substances that have an influence on our environment and health. When we carry our children to school, we expose our children to particularly serious local emissions. Emissions of hydrocarbons, nitric oxides and particles add to the risk of developing allergies and cancer. Before the catalyst has warmed up, car emissions are at their maximum since the cleansing activities have not yet started. Emissions peak during the first few kilometres such as during a short trip to a nearby school.

Reading a traffic situation requires experience and a sound judgment. Children could only get experience by being part of the traffic. Walking or cycling to school with your parents providing assistance, guidance and training situations has more to offer than being driven in a car until the age of 10-12. At that age they are thought to be grown-up enough to handle traffic situations when they cycle or walk.

Children walking or riding a bike to school are entrusted with the task and trained to perform it. They are able to move about in their near environment, become active and have a better self-confidence. A child that is constantly being taken to places is limited in his freedom of movement and has to rely on its parents, their timetables, opportunities and willingness to drive them.

Driving your children to school might offer considerable advantages. In some cases it is a suitable alternative. It is then a good thing if it is performed in the best possible way. You could perhaps leave the child some way away from the school building to let it walk the last distance and lower the concentration of cars in one spot.

Through planning, opportunities increase for parents to take several children in their car, children who live in the same area or along the road to school. Sharing a car puts less pressure on the traffic intensity around schools and improves the traffic situation. Two children in each car would diminish the number of cars around school considerably.

Mementos for architects and community planners

It is important that the schoolroad is in fact safe and experienced as such, to make school children feel secure and make parents want to let them walk or ride a bike to school. A number of physical measures could be taken to improve the situation such as:

- new walking and bicycle paths to avoid for the children to have to cross a motor road
- walking and bicycle paths clearly separated from motor roads
- create safer crossings by using fly-over junctions, crossings with speed limitations, and clearly marked crossings
- limited speeds on motor roads through road bumps or narrowing lanes
- widening paths to school road standards, 4 meters
- lit up paths, also at the side of the paths to create a sense of security
- clear away trees and shrubs along the paths to create security
- arrange proper bicycle stands. Parking lots for cars could perhaps be exchanged for bicycle stands
- clearing away snow from school roads should have high priority
- arrange for a new and safe place to drop children some distance from the school for those who choose to drive their children to school and home

Mementos for schools

Few areas offer so big opportunities for children to take part and have an influence as studies of their own transports to school. Staff, school children and parents could take part and use school roads as an important area of study. School children could investigate and describe the different ways of getting to school and suggest improvements. Together with the others, everyone could add to solutions to improve things.

To create motivation and increased knowledge the school could arrange thematic days for teachers. In unison with traffic planners and public health coordinators they could discuss school roads and paths.

Schools and parents could start a dialogue with the municipality traffic planners to improve school roads, perhaps in the way described above.

Teachers could be trained in the Story Line teaching method. This starts with a story dealing with traffic, environment and health. Children and teachers build a fictitious universe where various things happen and the children act certain parts. There are connections with the everyday life of the children and their families.

As part of school activities the children could study their school roads and document existing problems. Children could be invited to write travel diaries on different modes of transport and the results used for practical exercise. You could for instance estimate the gain of lesser amounts of pollution, money saved and health improvements. Invite the community traffic planner to study the children's travel diaries and ideas to make their experiences part of the planning process for physical measures.

Schools could provide parents with catalogues to make it possible for them to find other children in their housing area to start "ambulating school transports" – parents taking turns to walk their own and other children to school.

Road safety policies for schools

Schools could adopt a road safety policy for school children, parents, teachers and other staff.

A road safety policy might include most things relevant to road safety, such as the use of bicycle helmets, reflexes, riding a bike to school, safe school roads, using a safety belt on the bus, cautious driving around school buildings, safe school transports and safe paths for walking and cycling.

To make a policy a relevant, living document everyone has to participate. It is important to incorporate school children, parents and staff in the process of creating a road safety policy since all of them will be concerned with it in their daily lives.

The policy is important for adults and children alike. If the policy states that a bicycle helmet should be used, this goes for staff and parents too. Adults set examples.

On the moped

Driving a moped has become increasingly popular in Sweden over the past years. This also shows in accident statistics, unfortunately, with an increasing number of injured and dead. Most moped accidents are one-vehicle accidents with moped riders falling off or driving into some solid object.

The head is often most exposed at a moped accident. If a helmet is not used, the injuries may be very severe, leading to personality changes, loss of memory, speech difficulties, paralysis or even death. Using a helmet is a simple and economic way to diminish the risk of serious injuries.

According to Swedish law an approved helmet (marked with E or SIS) is mandatory for driving a moped or giving someone a lift on a moped.

The highest speed permitted for the class I moped (EU moped) is 45 kms/hour and the vehicle has to be registered. The driver should be 15 years, have a driving licence for moped or a driver's license for vehicles classed A1, A or B. Today's EU mopeds could easily be tuned up to make 60-70 kms/hour, even 80 kms is not unusual. Class II mopeds should make 25 kms/hour at the most, have a maximum engine capacity of 1 kwh and the driver must be 15 years old.

Mementos for moped drivers

Watch out for tuned up mopeds. Always use your helmet and get an extra helmet for passengers – the law applies to them too. Never combine drink and driving and follow traffic regulations.

If you are caught riding a tuned up moped or driving when drunk you will have difficulties getting the certificate of fitness to drive when time comes to start driving practice for motorbike or car.

If the moped is carefully looked after it will fetch a good price more easily when you want to sell it. You should service your moped from time to time to make it last longer and look better.

Mementos for parents

Give the moped a trial run. Check that it has not been tuned up and that brakes and headlights work. The faster the moped, the greater the risk that your teenager will be seriously hurt in traffic. Talk to them about the risks and make them see that tuning up is never worth it. It is also against the law and as a parent, you are responsible. If the moped has been tuned up there is a risk that the insurance against damage is not valid.

See to it that your child uses an approved helmet and understands the risks of drunken driving. Most teenagers see the implications if you take the time of explaining and make them imagine themselves in the situation. At best drunken driving is stopped by the police, at worst it turns into your teenager's last trip.

Arrange for your teenager to have proper driving instructions.

Mementos for schools

Discuss in class risks and advantages of driving mopeds. Let the young themselves word problems and solutions. Use teaching methods such as forum games, storyline and role plays.

Mementos for the moped industry

Do not sell tuned mopeds or fittings used for tuning. Inform the young and their parents of current regulations concerning tuning, alcohol and the use of helmets. Also tell them about what happens if you violate the regulations (fines, no certificate of fitness to drive, injuries etc)

Alcohol and drugs

Most Swedish motorists are of the opinion that alcohol, drugs and traffic don't mix well. In spite of this, alcohol and drugs are an enormous risk factor in traffic. The Swedish police reported some 26 500 drunken driving offences in 2003, 21 000 of which were related to alcohol, 5 500 to other drugs.

One of the effects of alcohol is to moderate inhibitions and lower the sense of judgment, self criticism and the ability to make realistic estimates. This might make a person take the decision to drive after having consumed alcohol – although the person would normally be well aware of the dangers. Alcohol also has a direct impact on capacity. It stuns the central nervous system and interferes with the interplay of muscles and nerves. Vision, ability to respond and coordinate and watchfulness are severely disturbed. The risk of tiredness increases and the ability to handle critical situations diminishes.

Even if young people see themselves as individuals when at the centre of attention, they are often unconsciously exposed to group pressure. Driving safely is then perhaps not the most interesting issue. Taking risks yourself becomes a way of being part of the group. Risk behaviours in traffic are often linked to other types of risk behaviours. It is also a matter of testing the limits.

In general, drunken drivers come from three social groups – young people aged 18-25, criminals and people using drugs.

Other drugs than alcohol influence the ability to drive. One group is what is commonly referred to as narcotics such as amphetamine, cannabis, heroine and cocaine. Certain pharmaceuticals make up another group, several of them classified as narcotics. They all have an impact on the nervous system. They could cause tiredness, drowsiness, lower level of attention, sleepiness or exhilaration.

Compared to our knowledge of alcohol we know little of the role of the other drugs in motor traffic. It is harder to check if someone is under the influence of drugs. The effects of drugs also vary from one individual to another.

Mementos for young people

Never drive a car or moped when under the influence of drink.

Be brave enough to refuse to go with an intoxicated or doped driver. If you do, without trying to stop him or her, you are an accomplice in case of an accident. And you will also be involved in the accident and possibly hurt.

Stop others from driving when under the influence of drink. Ask others for assistance. You will have to risk that your mate turns on you. Rather a quarrel than a funeral. Here are some tips on how to stop someone from drunken driving:

- Make him (most often it's a boy) listen to your arguments: "You could lose your licence", "What would your parents say if you're caught?", "You'll go to jail if you're stopped with a high percentage of alcohol", "The insurance isn't valid", "You could be a killer – 150 people are killed every year by drunken drivers", "You're a great fool!"
- Offer to pay for a taxi. It could be a cheap way of keeping a pal alive.

- Phone the parents
- Take the car keys
- Let the air out of the tyres
- Jam the exhaust pipe. The engine will stall (without being harmed) but your pal will stay alive
- Use force. Grapple with him, place yourself on top of him until he's changed his mind. Gang up with some others and hold him down. Throw the car keys in a lake. You might risk losing a friend, but at least he is alive.
- Phone the police. If you feel like an informer, remember that you are actually doing your friend a favour by stopping him.

You could be a dangerous driver of a car or moped for 24 hours after a wet night even if the percentage of alcohol in the blood has gone down to approved levels. Your powers to respond are lower and your judgment weaker.

Mementos for parents

Don't offer your teenagers alcoholic drinks. There are no studies to demonstrate that young people who have been offered alcohol at home, a glass of wine with the meal, develop a more relaxed attitude to alcohol and learn to master it better. On the contrary, they drink more alcohol than those who are not in the habit. They also start drinking at an earlier age.

It is sometimes wise to collect your young child after a party to prevent him or her from having to go with someone who might be intoxicated. You might involve other parents.

Mementos for schools

Discuss in class the risks of alcohol and drugs and why you should never drive yourself when under the influence or go with someone who is. Let the teenagers themselves work problems and solutions. Use teaching methods such as forum games, storyline and role plays.

School authorities should provide all teachers with facts on the risks of alcohol and drugs in combination with driving. The school could also support parents by inviting them for discussions and organise courses on alcohol and risk behaviour.

A driving licence of your own

In Sweden the minimum age for getting a driver's licence for a car is 18. Young drivers are unfortunately greatly over-represented in accident statistics. Young drivers' accidents are mostly due to lack of experience. In addition there are high speeds and the influence of drink. Very many young people don't bother to use safety belts.

Analyses of fatal accidents involving young drivers show, that most of them concern young men and almost every accident has elements of high speed beyond legal limits, alcohol/drugs and inadequate use of belts. Of the young drivers involved in fatal accidents, 85 percent are men. 45 percent are believed to have driven more than 30 kms above the speed limit, 40 percent did not use a belt and 27 percent were under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. In 73 percent of the cases, factors such as very high speeds, no safety belts and the influence of alcohol or drugs caused the accident and its consequences.

In fatal accidents involving young drivers, other people are also killed – passengers or fellow-travellers.

Single-car accidents, accidents at night and on holiday nights more often involve young drivers.

Mementos for parents

Habits are fundamental for everyday behaviours. If you neglect the use of safety belts as a young person, you are more apt to go on doing so as a driver.

Parents could make a good start for their children by teaching them to always use the belt in the car. They could also set a good example by observing speed limits and never drive under the influence of drink.

Mementos for schools

Discuss in class the risks to which young drivers expose themselves and their fellow-travellers and why so many young drivers are involved in serious road accidents. Let the young people themselves word problems and solutions. Use teaching methods such as forum games, storyline or role play.

References

The list of references, starting with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, contains official documents in Swedish on the convention, road safety for children and the young, school roads, and public health. They are such as government bills and regulations, the Education Act, curriculum's for schools, documents from authorities like the National Road Administration, the National Society for Road Safety, the National Agency for Education, and others. There are also a number of websites in the list.

Here follows the complete list in Swedish:

FN:s konvention om barnets rättigheter (Barnkonventionen)
Regeringens proposition 1997/98:56 Transportpolitik för hållbar utveckling
Regeringens proposition 1997/98:182 Strategi för genomförande av FN:s Barnrättskonvention.
Regeringens proposition 2002/03:35 Mål för folkhälsan.
Skollagen (1985:1100)
Förordning (1970:340) om skolskjutsning
Strategiska plan 2003–2006 (Vara kommun, 2003)
Läroplaner för det obligatoriska skolväsendet och de frivilliga formerna, Lpo 94, Lpf 94.
Jag vill ha inflytande överallt (Skolverket, 1998)
Trafik, miljö och samhällsplanering (Vägverket och Skolverket, 2000)
Dödade mopedister 1997–2002 (Vägverket publikation 2004:34)
Fara med barn – Om barn och bilsäkerhet (Folksam, 2004)
Fara med barn – Forskarnas fakta om barn och bilsäkerhet (Folksam, 2004)
Barn och trafiksäkerhet (NTF)
Säkra din trafikmiljö (NTF)
Så gör man en trafiksäkerhetspolicy i skolan (NTF)
Mopeden. Farlig leksak eller smart fordon? (NTF)
Resor till skolan (Hans Thulin, KFB&VTI 30/2000)
www.vv.se (Vägverket)
www.konsumentverket.se (Konsumentverket)
www.mopeden.nu (Göteborgs Stad Trafikkontoret)
www.trafikforlivet.se (Göteborgs Stad Trafikkontoret)
www.ntf.se (Nationalföreningen för Trafiksäkerhetens Främjande)
www.mhf.se (Motorförarnas Helykterhetsförbund)
www.alkoholkommitten.se (Alkoholkommittén)
www.cykelframjandet.se (Cykelfrämjandet)
www.svenskacykelhjalmsgruppen.nu (Svenska Cykelhjalmsgruppen)
www.vara.se (Vara kommun)