

**Raising Parents' Awareness of Road Safety for Their Children.
'Way to Go' - Road Safety Information for Parents**

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Abstract

An important component of child road safety is making parents aware of their responsibilities towards practising safe behaviours for children to follow. Children are educated in the classroom about road safety issues and the skills needed to negotiate varying traffic situations, but who educates the parents?

Transport SA have developed 'Way To Go' to provide road safety information to parents. 'Way To Go' covers 22 different road safety topics with information for parents on the front and a child activity relevant to the child's primary year level on the reverse side. To ensure that parents take notice of this information, children are encouraged to complete the activity at home with the parents' help. The answers for all the child activities are contained in the front of the sheet. The distribution of 'Way To Go' is through the primary school classroom and can be easily linked to the school's road safety plan.

A market research company tested the parent information by using five focus groups comprising parents of primary school aged children, covering metropolitan and rural areas and private and public primary schools.

The child activities were designed by Transport SA staff and were reviewed by eighteen primary school teachers in a full day workshop. Almost all the recommendations suggested by the teachers were included in the final product.

Initial reactions from schools are that it will be a valuable inclusion into their road safety plan.

Introduction

When Transport SA embarked on the Safe Routes to School program, it was recognised that providing parents with information on road safety was an integral part of the program. This information needed to be relevant to the issues around schools and also needed to reinforce the road safety skills and behaviours being taught in the classroom. It was decided that the approach would be a sheet including parent information as well as an activity

for the child to complete at home with parental help. An introductory sheet would be included and 22 topics relating to road safety would be covered. Child activities needed to be age-appropriate so it was decided to include activities that were in junior primary (reception to year 2), middle primary (years 3 to 5) and upper primary (years 6 and 7) age ranges reflecting the structure of 'Road Ready', the South Australian Road Safety Curriculum resource used in the classroom.



Parent Information

This information was sourced from various areas, is well known and consistent with current road safety practice in Australia. Importantly, themes cover the most pertinent traffic issues occurring around schools and complement the road safety messages taught to students in the classroom. Having covered the general issues such as parking, crossings, and use of seatbelts and restraints, it was necessary to cross-reference the information to 'Road Ready' in order to complement all road safety topics which may potentially be covered in the classroom.

A graphic design company was given the task to produce a colourful and attractive information sheet that would grab the attention of parents and provide easy to read information. The designers also came up with the 'Way To Go' name for the new information sheets. It was decided that the parent information and the design of the sheets needed to be market tested.

Market Research

A market research company put 'Way To Go' to the test. Five focus groups were conducted consisting of the following:

- ?? parents of children attending public Primary Schools in central metropolitan Adelaide
- ?? parents of children attending public Primary Schools in northern metropolitan Adelaide
- ?? parents of children attending private Primary Schools in metropolitan Adelaide
- ?? parents of children attending public Primary Schools in Regional South Australia (Riverland)

Each focus group ran for approximately 90 minutes with a total of 43 parents involved in the discussions. Male and female parents were well represented in all five groups.

The focus groups provided a great deal of positive feedback regarding the content and format of the information sheets and did make some suggestions to improve them. These included, less text, use of colour on the illustrations and clarification of the messages communicated by some of the illustrations. The majority of these suggestions were applied to the final product. Generally there was enthusiastic support for the concept from all focus group participants. As stated in the market research report "Not one person in the five groups had anything than praise for the concept".



Child Activities

The child activities were designed to reinforce classroom learnings for children by encouraging parental involvement in helping to complete the activities. Activities targeting upper primary levels were the exception - and will be addressed separately below.

Design Considerations

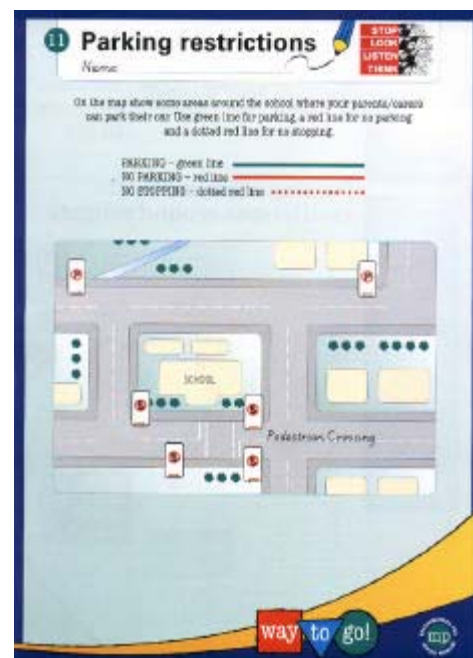
The following factors were considered when designing the activities:

- ?? engaging students with interesting, enjoyable, age-appropriate activities
- ?? ensuring that the activity would not be time consuming
- ?? including elements from the parental information in order to encourage students to discuss the activities with their parents (as discussed above)
- ?? clearly reinforcing and extending the concepts contained within 'Road Ready'
- ?? avoiding duplication of activities contained in 'Road Ready'

Consultative Process

Following the design of a draft set of activities, a consultative process involving a group of eighteen teachers provided a grass-roots 'reality check' to ensure relevance to the classroom situation. The teachers were from:

- ?? junior, middle and upper primary levels
- ?? public and private primary schools
- ?? schools in a range of socio-economic areas
- ?? schools whose students are representative of diverse cultural backgrounds
- ?? schools involved in the Safe Routes to School program
- ?? schools not involved in the program
- ?? schools not teaching road safety education

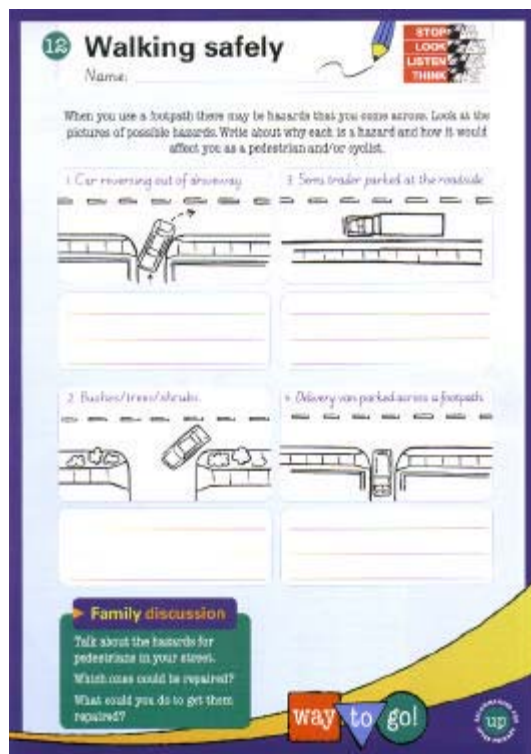


The teachers evaluated the sheets in terms of

- ?? appropriateness to the learner
- ?? information about the learning activity
- ?? the format and layout

Teachers provided invaluable feedback and constructive criticism. The fact that the draft activities were amended to incorporate teachers' feedback increased the group's ownership of the resource, and greatly enhanced its credibility. This was clearly evident at a follow up workshop where the teachers were shown the final product and could see where their suggestions had been incorporated. The follow up workshop was found to be critical for Transport SA. Comments from many teachers were “it is rewarding to see our ideas used because too often

when we are involved in reviews, our suggestions are never taken on board” and, “it is great that Transport SA has taken the time to show us how our suggestions have been used”. The goodwill gained from this workshop means Transport SA now has a group of teachers prepared to be advocates for road safety education in schools.



A key initiative came from the upper primary teachers who proposed that a 'Family Discussion Point' be included to supplement the child activities for upper primary level. It was felt that this older group of students would in the main be less likely to require parental assistance to complete their activities, therefore the discussion point would provide an age-appropriate and thought provoking opportunity to further explore the issues, while still operating as a tool to involve parents in the learnings.

The final product was aligned vertically and horizontally to ensure a consistent and appropriate degree of complexity at each level, and a variety of activities between the levels.

Implementation

'Way To Go' sheets are provided free of charge to schools. Ideally, they will be strategically distributed to families over time to maintain an ongoing long-term emphasis on road safety, but avoid overloading them with information.

Schools involved in the Safe Routes to School program are encouraged to incorporate use of the 'Way To Go' resource into their ongoing traffic safety education plans, coordinating distribution of sheets with related topics in 'Road Ready'. A matrix providing a cross-reference between 'Road Ready' topics and individual 'Way To Go' sheets has been developed to further assist teachers with distribution. The matrix suggests essential and recommended links between the two resources.

Folders are provided to children involved in the Safe Routes to School program. Storage of sheets in the folder will provide an easily accessible reference for families.

There is also the opportunity for schools outside of the Safe Routes to School program to use the resource on an *ad hoc* basis in order to address specific issues. For instance, a school not involved in teaching road safety might use selected sheets to communicate with parents about parking, safe crossing issues, or the installation of a new pedestrian facility. In this way the resource will provide an opportunity to target a new audience for road safety teaching - encouraging schools to use 'Road Ready' in addition to 'Way To Go'.

Future developments in order to improve the product might include

- ?? translations into other languages
- ?? consideration of literacy issues
- ?? communication of like information to other adults with responsibility for care or supervision of children (eg part-time carers like relatives and family friends)

Conclusions

'Way To Go' fills a void in road safety education. Increasingly children are educated about road safety in schools and this needs to be reinforced at home. Parents are still the role models for the children but are often unclear on traffic issues and road rules, which can create confusion for the children. The information in 'Way To Go' gives parents the knowledge they need to provide their children with a clear and consistent message on road and traffic safety. This helps children to make safer choices.

References

Harrison Market Research, Report prepared for Transport SA, May 2000, 'Way To Go' Parent Information Sheets