



Safety in traffic for children

A role for parents

It is important to use effective ways to evoke the parents' interest in road safety and to inform them about how they can support their children in traffic. This is the main recommendation in a SWOV study into the role of parents in their children's traffic education.

Formal and informal

Acquiring safe traffic behaviour requires a lot of time, not only for formal education, but also for practical exercise and learning from everyday experience in traffic and from the example set by others: the informal learning process. Such informal traffic education usually takes place outside the school, in part because schools usually lack the time and the possibility to spend sufficient time on formal traffic education. Most parents are pre-eminently in the position to teach their children how they should behave in traffic. Parents are often present when their children mix in traffic and they can use those occasions to familiarize them with traffic and to set the correct example. To make this informal learning process as good and effective as possible, SWOV investigated the role that parents may fulfil.

Survey

Part of the study was a questionnaire study among parents having at least one child of primary school age (4 to 12 years old). The study asked questions about what the parents already know about their children's development in traffic participation, what further information they would like to receive, and if and how they would wish to be approached with new information and means. The study also asked about the nature of the child's traffic participation, the parents' assessment of the child's skills, about how they judge the road safety of the route to school, and about the ways the parents actively support their children in traffic. The parents' knowledge and knowledge requirements were also surveyed.

Proactive

The questionnaire study showed that most

parents are convinced that they more than anyone are in the position to teach their children how to behave in traffic. Parents are also very aware of being a role model: they reportedly show better behaviour when they take part in traffic together with their children. The study also indicated that when parents are in traffic with the child, they especially pay attention to potential threats and correct the child if it makes an error. Parents tend to make less use of more proactive types of guidance, like spontaneously giving explanations, showing how to do something properly, and rewarding correct behaviour. As other research found that stressing what is not allowed and incorrect can negatively affect children's behaviour, it may be worthwhile to stimulate parents to use a more proactive form of support.

Advice

Although concerning informal traffic education they could benefit from information about the ways their children learn best, parents usually do not see the necessity of receiving more information. In addition, they have many other,

competing concerns other than road safety and traffic education. SWOV therefore advises to use the insights from the study to find a clever way to interest parents in road safety and to inform them about how they can support their

children in traffic. One possibility is to join in with other concerns in relation with the child that parents find more important, like the child's physical well-being.

The following SWOV reports have been published about informal education:

T. Hoekstra & D. Twisk (2010). The role of parents in the informal learning process of children in the age group 4 to 12 years-old; A first investigation. R-2010-19

T. Hoekstra & J. Mesken (2010). The role of parents in informal traffic education; Questionnaire study of parents' knowledge, needs and motivation. R-2010-31