

factsheet

road crashes

This factsheet presents background information mainly for people working with children and families, and students undertaking projects.

More advice on road safety can be found in **capt's** pictorial booklet *It's fun to go our but...* written for parents and carers, especially those with low literacy.

Child Accident Prevention Trust publishes a range of resources for parents, carers and older children, containing comprehensive safety advice. A complete list of these resources – leaflets, booklets, posters, guides, etc – can be found at www.capt.org.uk together with details of how to obtain them.

How many children are killed or injured in road crashes?

Road crashes are a major cause of death among children. They represent about 12% of all deaths in the 5-14 age group. They constitute increasing proportions of accidental deaths as children get older.

In 2006, over 23,000 children aged under 15 years were killed or injured on the UK's roads. Casualty numbers by severity of injury for each country in the UK and for Great Britain are given in the table below.

	Fatal	Serious	Slight	All severities
England	105	2,203	16,677	18,985
Scotland	25	348	1,648	2,021
Wales	10	134	1,153	1,297
Northern Ireland	9	143	826	978
Great Britain	140	2,685	19,478	22,303
UK (i.e. GB + NI)	149	2,828	20,304	23,281

The governments in each of the four countries of the UK have set targets for the reduction of child road casualties by 2010, using the period 1994-8 as the baseline. They are seeking a reduction of 50% in the numbers of children killed or seriously injured and 10% in the number of people slightly injured. Encouragingly, casualty numbers are falling at a rate that will allow these targets to be achieved, possibly before 2010.

Most child road casualties are pedestrians or passengers in cars, with significant numbers of children injured while cycling.

How do we compare with other countries in

The rate of child road deaths in the UK compares favourably with most countries in western Europe. However, the child pedestrian death rate in the UK is poor compared with these countries. In 2001, Sweden (the best country) had 0.3 deaths per 100,000 children, whereas the UK had 0.9.

Economic and social factors

Social and economic factors play a part in child road injuries. Research has shown that children from social class V are five times more likely to be killed as pedestrians than those from social class I. Children whose families have fewer resources tend to live near more dangerous road environments, have fewer provisions for safe places to play, and tend to go out as pedestrians more often than children from wealthier homes.

What can be done to reduce child road injury and death?

There are a number of factors that are known to reduce the risk of death and serious injury if a crash occurs. These include

- reducing traffic speed through the use of traffic calming where children may be present as pedestrians and cyclists. Research has shown that if hit by a car travelling at 40 mph, 85% of pedestrians are killed, at 30 mph this percentage falls to 45%, and at 20 mph it becomes 5% with 30% suffering no injuries at all.
- using protective equipment such as cycle helmets. Over 70% of all cycling deaths and over half of all cycling injuries involve a head injury. Cycle helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 85% but fewer than one child on five over 10 years wears a helmet.
- a correctly fitted and used child restraint can greatly reduce the risk of death in a crash. In simple terms, the law requires ALL children to be carried in child restraints that are appropriate for their size with very few exceptions. The law covers children under 12 years old, but only if they are less than 135 cm (about 4ft 5in) in height. If a child is taller than 135 cm they are allowed to use an adult seat belt, regardless of their age. (For more information about the safety of children in cars, download a copy of the **capt** factsheet *Child car restraints*, visit www.childcarsafety.org.uk or contact **capt** and request a copy of the leaflet *How safe is your child in the car?*)

Pedestrian accidents can be reduced through:

- traffic management that encourages drivers to avoid residential streets
- pedestrian crossings, parking restrictions and the provision of playgrounds all help to make the environment safer for children
- the creation of 'Home Zones' in residential streets where speeds are kept to around 10 mph and pedestrians and cyclists have priority over cars. (Visit www.homezonenews.org.uk).

Road safety education and training can be directed at drivers, parents and children:

- drivers need to learn that low speeds in residential areas and around schools and playgrounds will increase their chance of stopping in time and will reduce the likelihood of serious injury and death if they are in collision with a child.
- parents need information to understand their children's ability to cope with traffic and to be able to help their children learn pedestrian skills over time.
- children need adult supervision, roadside pedestrian skills training and road safety education in schools. Many local authorities run pedestrian training schemes in conjunction with schools.
- in Scotland, the Scottish Road Safety Campaign runs the Children's Traffic Club that provides resources to parents to assist them with road safety education of young children (www.road-safety.org.uk)
- "walking bus" schemes, which allow children to walk to and from school in supervised groups safely, can help children learn how to negotiate roads safely – again ask your road safety officer about such schemes or visit www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk.
- many road safety officers run cycle training schemes.

Further help and advice

Your local council's road safety officers should be able to tell you what road safety schemes, such as cycle training and practical pedestrian training schemes are available in your area. They may also be able to help you if you have a specific road safety problem in your area.

Capt has separate factsheets about child pedestrian and child cyclist accidents, and a question and answer sheet about child car restraints. These can be accessed through the **capt** website, www.capt.org.uk.

Revised: May 2008

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