

DRIVING MISS DAISY... SAFELY

Early Learning Association Australia's new road safety and safe transport policies will assist educators and providers to protect children while travelling and provide helpful tips on best practice when transporting children. While this article focuses on the Safe Transport Policy for Family Day Care (FDC) educators, ELAA has also produced a Road Safety Education Policy for FDC educators and a separate Road Safety and Safe Transport Policy for early childhood centre-based services.

Car crashes are one of the leading causes of child death in Australia. Several thousand children aged birth to six years are hospitalised each year in Australia from injuries sustained in car crashes.

And while studies by road safety researchers show that almost all young children in Australia (98 per cent) use child restraints when they travel in cars, about one quarter of children are using the wrong type of restraint for their age, and about 70 per cent of restraints are incorrectly installed or used.

Wrongly installed or used child car seats have alarming consequences for children in a car crash. It is estimated that 42 per cent of child deaths in car crashes and 55 per cent of injuries could be eliminated if all children aged one to six were travelling in an appropriate child car seat that was correctly installed, according to a recent study by Australian road safety researchers, published in the medical journal *Pediatrics*¹.

ELAA has worked with VicRoads, leading early childhood experts, sector representatives and Family Day Care Australia to develop road safety education and safe transport policies. All three policies are based on the NQF and the National Guidelines for the Safe Restraint of Children Travelling in Motor Vehicles. These guidelines were developed by Neuroscience Research Australia and provide best practice recommendations that have been approved by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The purpose of the policies is twofold:

- to provide evidence-based, best practice guidelines to ensure children are kept safe while travelling as pedestrians, cyclists or passengers in vehicles and
- to ensure children are able to participate in road safety education to help them to become safe and responsible road users.

The *Safe Transport Policy (Family Day Care)* is based on the *Best Practice Guidelines for the Safe Transportation of Children in Vehicles* published by Neuroscience Research Australia, an independent, not-for-profit research institute. This policy reflects best practice and goes beyond the minimum legal requirements outlined in Australian road laws.

For example, it is legal to use a safety harness, also known as an H harness, for children travelling in cars in Victoria, however the policy recommends against their use. Research shows that safety harnesses provide no safety advantages over lap-sash seat belts and may, in fact, increase the risk of injury.

While the law sets minimum standards for the safe transportation of children, we still need to do the best we can to protect children and keep them safe while travelling, especially when we have the scientific evidence and the knowledge about the type of best practices that should be implemented.

We understand that we're aiming high with these best practices and recognise that it may take some time for family day care educators to take on all aspects of the policy. We will provide support with education and resources to help the sector adopt the policy.

Moonee Valley City Council, a local government authority in Melbourne's inner west, is trialling the best practice policy among its 11 family day care services. The council has held professional development sessions for educators and coordinators about the best practice policies.

Gurpreet Thiara, the council's Children Services Development Officer, said educators' main concerns include how to determine the age and appropriateness of a car seat, especially when parents provide their own car seat.

"Educators appreciated the information they received from the training session and they are now more confident, not only in transporting children in their care, but in answering questions from families about safe transportation," Ms Thiara said.

The three best practice policies, developed in partnership with VicRoads, are an example of how diverse organisations could work together to create practical improvements for educators, children and families in early learning services.

1. Wei Du, Caroline F. Finch, Andrew Hayden, Lynne Bilston, Julie Brown and Julie Hatfield (2010) 'Pediatrics', *Relative benefits of population-level interventions targeting restraint-use in child care passengers*, p304–312

Handy links

- https://elaa.org.au/services_resources/road_safety_education
- www.childcarseats.com.au





GOING THE EXTRA DISTANCE: KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT TRANSPORTING CHILDREN IN CARS SAFELY*

Know the law in your state

Go to your state road authority website for the road laws relating to child restraints.

Use the safest child restraints

Go to childcarseats.com.au for information on the safety ratings of child restraints. They are also rated on ease of use and the dimensions and weight of the restraints is provided. The policy recommends only using child restraints with a four star safety rating.

H Harnesses and accessories

It is recommended that child restraint accessories are not used unless prescribed by a health professional such as an occupational therapist. Child safety harnesses (H-harnesses) are not recommended. Child safety harnesses offer no additional protection over lap-sash seatbelts when used with boosters in frontal crashes, and can encourage submarining which is associated with abdominal and lumbar spine injuries. They should only be considered for use in a seating position with a lap-only belt, used with a booster seat proven to prevent the child from sliding under the lap belt in a crash.

Adult seat belts and front seat travel

Children travelling in cars are best protected in a correctly installed size appropriate child restraint until they are approximately 145–150cm tall or they pass the “5 step test”. The policy recommends that children do not sit in the front seat of a car until they are over 145 cm tall.

P Platers

The policy asks providers to consider their position in relation to who is authorised to drive children. Statistics show that P plate drivers are the most likely to have crashes that involve casualties especially in the first 12 months of holding their license. We ask that you consider whether it is feasible for your service to have a position that only fully licensed drivers are authorised drivers.

Say no to booster cushions

Booster cushions were removed from the 2010 Australian/New Zealand Standards. Family day care services should use booster seats not booster cushions.

* Source: *Safe Transport Policy (Family Day Care)*

When can children use an adult seatbelt? The five step test

For a child to be able to sit in an adult seatbelt, the answers to all these questions should be ‘yes’:

1. Can the child sit with their back against the vehicle seat back?
2. Do the child's knees bend in front of the edge of the seat?
3. Does the sash belt sit across the middle of the shoulder?
4. Is the lap belt sitting low across the hips touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

