

TAKE CONTROL – A ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION EVALUATION

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Summary: 'Take Control' is a Road Safety input designed to highlight risks associated with young drivers and empower passengers to challenge inappropriate driving. A three-stage survey process evaluated the impact/ effectiveness of the talk. Whilst a change was seen in relation to attitudes towards general road safety, there were no changes in how likely respondents would be to challenge behaviour. In order to get the most value from Road Safety inputs, attention must be focused on what prevents people from having the confidence to speak up and then tailoring education strategies to address these. This will ensure an intervention targets what needs targeting (i.e. what is causing young people to get in these cars and what is stopping them from challenging inappropriate behaviour).

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to reduce the over representation of 16-25 year olds in collision/ casualty figures, an exploratory review was initiated to uncover what Education/ Enforcement initiatives are seen to have the greatest success. In relation to education, the recommendations identified a need to be clear about the purpose of initiatives in terms of what are you trying to achieve, and to carry out structured evaluations to assess if the desired effect is the actual effect. 'Take Control' is a Road Safety input delivered to S4 pupils through a joint initiative between Grampian Police and Grampian Fire and Rescue Service. The talk aims to highlight risks associated with the behaviour of young drivers and empower young people to challenge inappropriate driving they experience as passengers. To evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the talk a three-stage survey process was trialled at Mackie Academy, Stonehaven. A questionnaire was distributed prior to the input, followed by a post-talk questionnaire within a couple of weeks of the presentation and a third questionnaire administered 3 months later. The pre-talk survey was designed to identify existing attitudes and beliefs in relation to driving. The subsequent surveys explored change in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours following the input. 180 students responded to the initial questionnaire; 118 returned the second providing a retention rate of 65.6% and 119 respondents returned the third providing a retention rate of 66.1% compared to the initial survey. In depth qualitative and quantitative analysis was undertaken to explore key themes. This paper presents a summary of the key learning points to help inform the development of similar education initiatives. A full report is available on request.

PRE-TALK ATTITUDES

Existing attitudes were measured in a pre-talk questionnaire to provide a baseline for subsequent evaluation. Understanding the attitudes held prior to an input can help guide what the content should be and identify if there is a need for particular emphasis of certain risk factors or protective behaviours. The majority of respondents (83.3%) were keen to start driving as soon as they are 17. There were no individuals who did not see themselves driving at some point in the future. Respondents were asked if it is ok for drivers to carry out a range of behaviours (e.g. cross a junction knowing that the traffic lights have already turned red; chase another driver who has made them angry with the intention of giving them a piece of their mind; ignore speed limits late at night or early in the morning, get involved with unofficial races with other drivers; drive without a licence/ insurance). Whilst on the whole the behaviours were felt to be inappropriate, some were seen to be acceptable sometimes (e.g. driving close to the car in front as a signal to the driver to go faster and driving after a drink). Therefore, there is a need to identify and challenge circumstances in which risky behaviours are deemed to be appropriate.

Respondents were asked to rate how much difference a range of factors make in whether or not teenagers are safe in cars. The top ten rated safety risk factors can be categorised as:

- **Driver state** e.g. taken drugs; drunk alcohol; upset whilst talking on phone
- **Driver behaviour** e.g. text messaging, playing a video game, or using some other kind of hand held device; racing other cars; the car can go really fast and the driver is showing it off; speeding; putting on makeup; talking on a mobile phone

- **Passenger behaviour** e.g. trying to get the driver to speed, drive on the pavement or do 'do-nuts'

The compelling message is that young people appear to be aware of risks to safety. This is shown by the fact that all the factors are rated as making at least some difference by over three quarters of the respondents. This suggests that the focus of an education intervention need not necessarily focus on improving knowledge, but rather the focus should be on changing behaviour. Young people rate a variety of driver behaviours as high risk factors. However, there seems to be an underestimation of risks associated with passengers. When asked specifically about the effect passengers have on the chance that a young driver will have an accident, the majority of respondents (86.1%) identified that it increased the chance, meaning that 13.9% of respondents do not view passengers as a risk factor, including 1.7% who felt it decreased the chances of having an accident. Inputs could incorporate a discussion element about attitudes surrounding passengers to identify any misconceptions or explain some of the inherent dangers (e.g. distracting behaviours). One of the most challenging findings is the fact that young people do not believe it to be very likely that they will be involved in an accident as a passenger in someone else's car. This means that they may distance themselves from associated messages that are deemed irrelevant.

PRE-TALK EXPERIENCES

There is a trend of passengers failing to wear seatbelts. This is particularly prominent in back seat passengers with only 66.1% claiming that they always wear a seatbelt. Less than three quarters (72.2%) of respondents stated that they wear their seatbelt properly with the seat in the upright position, with 3.3% saying that they never do. Over three quarters (78.3%) of respondents had been a passenger in a car driven by a young driver. Respondents planning to drive as soon as they are 17 were more likely to have been in a car driven by a young driver compared to those planning to drive at some point in the future (83% vs. 65.5%).

Respondents were asked to state how often they had experienced each of the factors previously rated for safety in a car being driven by a young driver. Below is a comparison of safety risk ratings and experience levels:

High risk/ high experience - The car can go really fast and the driver is testing it out or showing off; driver is speeding

Low risk/ high experience - Music in the car is very loud; There are other teenagers in the car; driver is eating; Selecting music while driving; Driver and passengers singing and dancing along to the music

High risk/ low experience - driver has been taking drugs; driver has been drinking alcohol; driver is upset whilst talking on a mobile phone; driver is text messaging, playing a video game, or using some other kind of hand held electronic device; driver is putting on makeup.

The high experience elements, commonly seen when young drivers drive their friends as passengers, are all deemed to be low risk. There is a role for passenger behaviour type talks to highlight how some of these seemingly innocuous yet common behaviours can distract a driver's attention and put young people at risk.

TALK EVALUATION

In the first follow-up survey, the majority of respondents felt that: the information was interesting (84.7%), they learnt new things (84.7%), it made them more likely to think about road safety (82.2%) and it made them more likely to be a safer passenger (72.9%). Females were more likely to think about road safety (91.8% vs. 70.9%) as a result of the talks and also more likely to find the presentation to be too shocking (24.6% vs. 9.1%). The majority of pupils who attended (73.7%) said that they would recommend this course to other young people. Interestingly, respondents who said that they planned to learn to drive at some point were far more likely to recommend the course, compared to those who planned to learn to drive as soon as they were 17 (90.5% vs. 69.5%).

Respondents liked the visual representation of the crashes and car wreckages as it brought the message home about what actually happens in an accident. The real pictures of damaged cars made people think about the dangers faced at high speeds as well as 40mph. Whilst praised for their shock value, there were some caveats about whether some of the more graphic pictures were required. More than half of those identifying elements that they didn't like specified the graphic and gruesome images that related to the human impact of the crashes. There was a suggestion that the talk could utilise diagrams of injuries rather than real life pictures. In addition, more up to date photos and live videos were requested to help the respondents relate more closely. Popular features of the talks were the real life stories that brought about a realisation that it can happen to anyone. Specifically, there was an interest in recent and local stories that made the presentations more relevant to the audience and requests to hear from someone who has been involved in a crash.

Whilst there was an interest in the physical impact of the accidents, there was also an interest in how they were caused. There was a request for more emphasis on disabling injuries rather than death. The hard-hitting nature of the presentation was praised and respondents liked that the presentation was frank, serious and truthful. A key element they felt could be improved was more time being spent on *how* people could 'Take Control'.

PRESENTATION IMPACT

The post talk surveys assessed the key message that the pupils took away from the talks, short-term effects on attitudes, behavioural change, long-term attitude change and message degradation. The key message responses are categorised below in relation to the short-term message and long-term message.

- **Safety** (Short-term 44%, Long-term 54%) e.g. Always keep to the road safety rules and obey laws when driving; don't be stupid while driving; drive safely and responsibly; don't speed; don't drink drive; don't allow any sort of distraction to influence you
- **Take Control** (Short-term 30%, Long-term 27%) e.g. What we do and say in a car makes a difference even though we aren't driving; if you are a passenger you can be in control of the car and do something to try and prevent road accidents; If you feel unsafe or uncertain in a car tell them to stop and let you out; Don't get in a car with someone you don't trust; Only get in cars with responsible drivers
- **Passenger behaviour** (Short-term 14%, long-term 11%) e.g. Change behaviour whilst in a car; be sensible; always wear a seatbelt; be aware; be careful not to be distracting
- **Dangers** (Short-term 12%, Long-term 8%) e.g. not paying attention causes accidents; driving stupidly has consequences.

The findings suggest the talk is successful at raising awareness about dangers on the roads, the effect of passengers on safety and general road safety. However, the aim is to equip young people to Take Control as a passenger in a car and just under a third of respondents identified this as the key message. This suggests the content of the talk (the aftermath of accidents) may be diverting attention away from the core message.

ATTITUDE CHANGE

There was a change in attitudes immediately after the talk with an upward shift in respondents rating the increased effect of passengers. This was not a lasting change, however, and the three-month post talk assessment shows ratings back at pre-talk levels. There was an increase in those stating there was likelihood that they would be involved in an accident as a passenger. This should be tempered by the fact that there was also an increase in those saying that it was not very likely. There was no change between the two post talk surveys, which suggests that the attitude change had a long-term effect. Regardless of the change that occurred, the picture remains that very few young people identify themselves as likely to be involved in an accident.

Nine of the 33 potential safety risk factors were associated with attitude change and whilst it is not possible to say that the talk caused the attitude change, by looking at the nature of the safety factors that were associated with attitude change in comparison to those that were not, there may be inferences that can be drawn. Following the talk there was an increase in ratings that the use of drugs and alcohol by passengers make a lot of difference to safety. Alcohol ratings further increased between the two evaluation surveys and there was no change in drug ratings between the two evaluation surveys suggesting that attitude change remains. This may be the result of a heightened awareness of the impact that passengers can have on young drivers and the lessened ability to challenge inappropriate driving when drunk. Ratings of the risk of inexperienced drivers can be seen to be decreasing, whilst there was no difference between pre-talk attitudes and the short term evaluation, there was a difference between pre-talk attitudes and the long term evaluation questionnaire. It is worrying that young people seem to be moving towards a position where inexperience is not deemed to be a risk factor. This could affect their safety assessments when considering accepting lifts from young drivers.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Participants were asked after the first talk if they felt that the presentations would result in changing their behaviour in a car in any way. Two thirds of respondents felt that it would have an impact. Examples provided included:

- Take control if necessary: speak up if something is wrong or if I think something is wrong
- Be less distracting and more considerate as a passenger
- Drive more safely and responsibly
- Wear my seat belt correctly and more often
- Be more careful on the road/ in a car.

Whilst two thirds of passengers felt that their behaviour would change, only a quarter of respondents in the third survey reported that their behaviour had changed. Examples provided included:

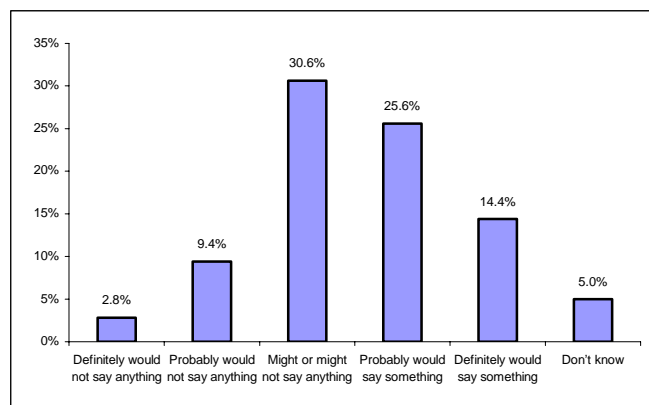
- Never distract driver: stopped talking to the driver as much and not been as loud
- More aware, observant and pay more attention to surroundings (checking for bad roads, speeding etc)
- Taken Control: Made the driver be more careful and more likely to say something if I felt uncomfortable
- Always wear a seatbelt
- Safer, more careful and cautious
- Much more careful about who I get in a car with/ I now avoid going into cars full of young people.

In the three months after the talk there was an increase in backseat passengers wearing their seat belt.

PASSENGER CONFIDENCE

A strategy to encourage people to 'take control' relies on their confidence to speak up when they feel that they are being driven inappropriately. The pre-talk survey findings of how likely a passenger would be to speak up are shown in the graph. There was no change between surveys in how likely respondents were to say something. The reasons preventing people saying something are summarised below:

- **Relationship (25%)** e.g. Not knowing the driver well, Who the driver was e.g. family, friend, somebody trusted/ respected, somebody good looking, Not wanting to be rude, offend or hurt drivers feelings
- **Repercussions/ reaction (25%)** e.g. In case they drove faster, worse or did stupid things to annoy or scare you, In case you got physically hurt e.g. got hit, started a fight, they were armed, Getting thrown out of the car, refused a lift or left in a random place, Angering/ upsetting the driver and therefore increasing the chances of a crash, Distracting the driver, Getting shouted at/ verbally abused, Creating an awkward situation/ confrontation
- **Driver characteristics (20%)** e.g. The existing mood of the driver e.g. angry/ upset/ bad mood, Aggressive/ intimidating driver, Intoxicated, Somebody deemed to be a good driver
- **Reputation (15%)** e.g. presence of other people in the car (enjoying it or not saying anything), Not wanting to look uncool, stupid, Being made fun of, spoiling the fun, Embarrassment, Fear of being wrong or thought to be overreacting/ worrying too much, Not wanting to look nervous or scared if a young driver is driving
- **Judgement (10%)** e.g. How unsafe/ inappropriate the driving was deemed to be, If they didn't feel in danger, Wouldn't mind as enjoy driving at speed/ having fun, Wouldn't think they were likely to have an accident
- **Personal characteristics (5%)** e.g. inexperienced with driving/ driving theory and therefore not in a position to judge the driver who has passed their test, intoxicated, lack of confidence, too scared to say anything.



In the three months after the talk, 13.4% respondents had been in car they felt was being driven inappropriately. Of those, half said something. The reasons given for not saying anything included: Awkward situation, 'Cause it's my dad, He'd just go faster and ignore me anyway, and I was enjoying myself/ having too much fun.

LEARNING POINTS

The Take Control talk is designed to encourage young people to challenge behaviour when they believe they are being driven inappropriately. Therefore, the evaluation criterion must assess passenger confidence to challenge behaviour and reported behaviour change. Whilst there was a change seen in relation to general road safety and the dangers of crashes, this was not the core function of the talk. There were no changes in relation to how likely respondents would be to challenge behaviour and reasons for not speaking up remain consistent. In order to get the most value from the education input, attention must be focused on what is preventing people from having the confidence to speak up and then tailoring education around strategies to challenge. It is only through an understanding of young people's existing attitudes and motivations that effective strategies can be put in place. By identifying the appropriate foundation for the intervention, it will ensure that the input targets what needs targeting (i.e. what is causing young people to get in these cars and what is stopping them from challenging inappropriate behaviour).

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Kelly HR, 2010. Take Control – A Road Safety Education Evaluation Research Report. Grampian Police.