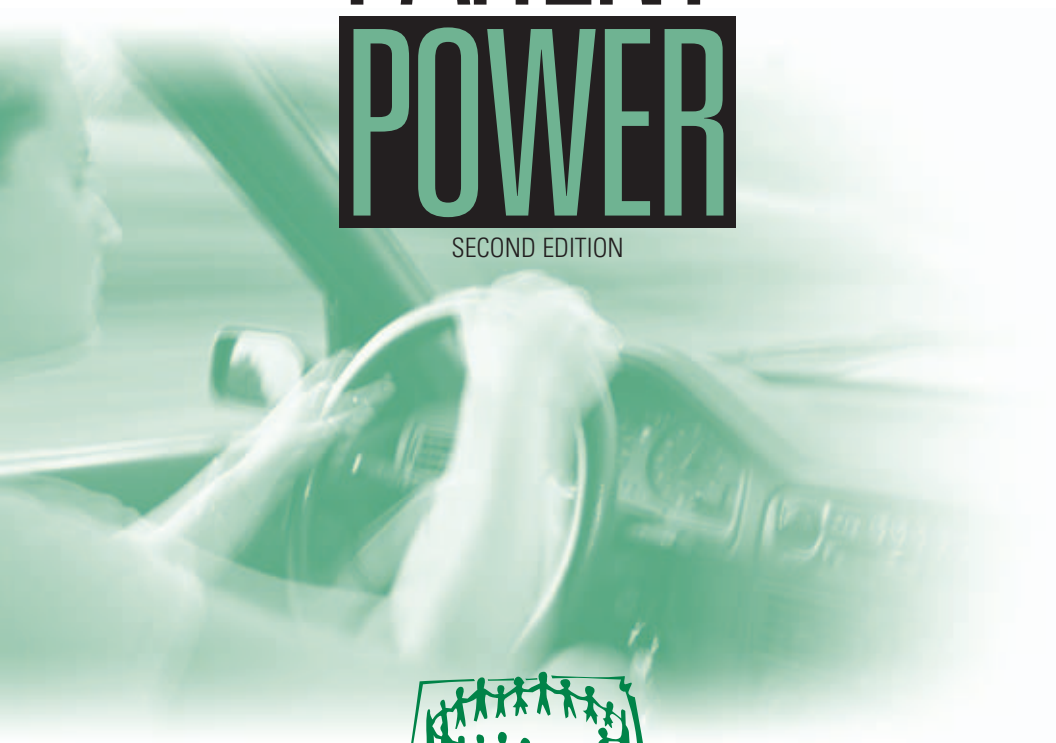
Parents — moms, and especially dads — can make a potentially life-saving difference in their children's lives.

Teen Seat-Belt Use:
A Community Youth Development Approach

PARENT POWER

SECOND EDITION



SOUTH DAKOTA
COALITION
FOR CHILDREN

A report based on information compiled by the South Dakota Coalition for Children, in Cooperation with the South Dakota Department of Health, the South Dakota Office of Highway Safety, the South Dakota Department of Education and made possible in part by a grant from the Wellmark Foundation.

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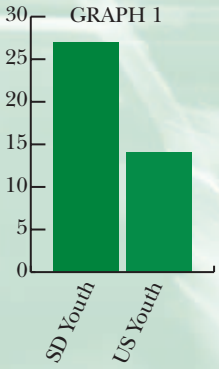
Written by Betsy Rice, communications coordinator, South Dakota Coalition for Children.

NEVER/RARELY

Percentage of South Dakota and U.S. youth who report never or rarely wearing a Seatbelt, 2001

Source: South Dakota and National Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, 2001



TALKING TO TEENAGERS

Teens listen to their parents.

Surprised?

They listen with their ears — and with their eyes. And when it comes to seat-belt use, parents have a great deal more influence over their high-school age children than they might imagine. Parents have the power to make buckling up a habit with their kids.

That eye-opener came as the result of a project led by the South Dakota Coalition for Children to encourage seat-belt use by teens. Statistics about the grim consequences of young people's low rates of seat-belt use in South Dakota prompted the effort.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Only 20 percent of South Dakota teens are in the habit of using seat belts when riding in a motor vehicle, and just one in three buckles up when driving.[1] Some 27 percent of South Dakota teens report they never or rarely wear a seat belt when riding in a vehicle. That compares to 14 percent of teens nationally.[2] (See graph 1.)

Low use appears to correlate with this state's higher-than-average violent death rate among teens. The single greatest cause? Vehicle crashes, which in 2001 accounted for 44 percent of all teen deaths in the state.[3]

Teens scorn seat-belt use, despite Conclusive evidence that safety restraints could prevent approximately 60 percent of deaths to motor-vehicle occupants.[4]

[1] *2001 South Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report*

[2] *South Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey Trend Data, 1991-2001*

[3] *South Dakota Vital Statistics and Health Status: 2001, South Dakota Department of Health.*

[4] *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Benefits of safety belts and motorcycle helmets: report to Congress, February 1996. Washington DC: United States Department of Transportation.*

GETTING TEENS TO BUCKLE UP

How can South Dakota teens be persuaded to buckle up? A search for answers prompted the South Dakota Coalition for Children to initiate "Teen Seat Belt Use: A Community Youth Development Approach." Teens and adults in target communities designed strategies to make seat-belt use a habit among more of their peers. Mitchell, Milbank and Cheyenne River-Eagle Butte were selected as representative of the state's urban, rural and reservation settings.

Three comparable South Dakota communities—Brookings, Webster and Mission — were also measured to provide a benchmark control in evaluating project results.

Teens came up with a variety of ideas for promoting seat belt use among their peers:

- Presentations before community groups (school assemblies, civic clubs), featuring the "Seat Belts Save Lives" video[1], speakers, including a crash survivor, emergency room nurse, doctor or law enforcement officer,
- Buckle-up reminder signs on billboards and in parking lot exits,
- Exhibit of crashed car whose occupants survived because of seat belts,
- Seat belt checks,
- Various public service slogans and reminders.

While the project did not result in an increase in seat-belt use among teens in the intervention communities, it did point to influences that may lead ultimately to that goal.

WHY DON'T TEENS BUCKLE UP?

Questionnaires completed by ninth- through 12th-graders in all six communities indicate that seat belt use is not a habit. Surveys revealed the following (beginning with the most common) reasons that teens give for not buckling up routinely (see graph 2):

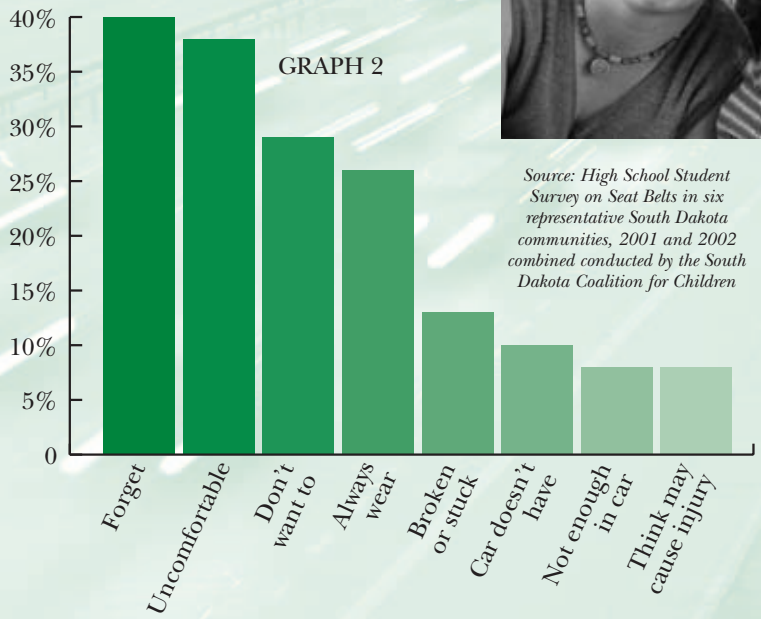
- Forgot,
- Uncomfortable,
- Don't want to,
- Broken or stuck,
- Car doesn't have safety equipment,
- Not enough seatbelts in car.

Cited by slightly less than 10 percent of respondents was a seventh reason: Using seat belts may cause injury. Teens also said they're considerably less likely to use seat belts on a date. Additional reasons revealed by youth in focus group discussions:

- It's not cool,
- They aren't used to using seat belts — it's not a habit,
- Short trip,
- In a hurry,

[1] *Seat Belts Save Lives video is available from the South Dakota Office of Highway Safety, 118 W. Capitol Avenue, Pierre, SD*

"Why don't you wear a seat belt?"
Teen Survey Responses 2001-2002



GRAPH 2

Source: High School Student Survey on Seat Belts in six representative South Dakota communities, 2001 and 2002 combined conducted by the South Dakota Coalition for Children

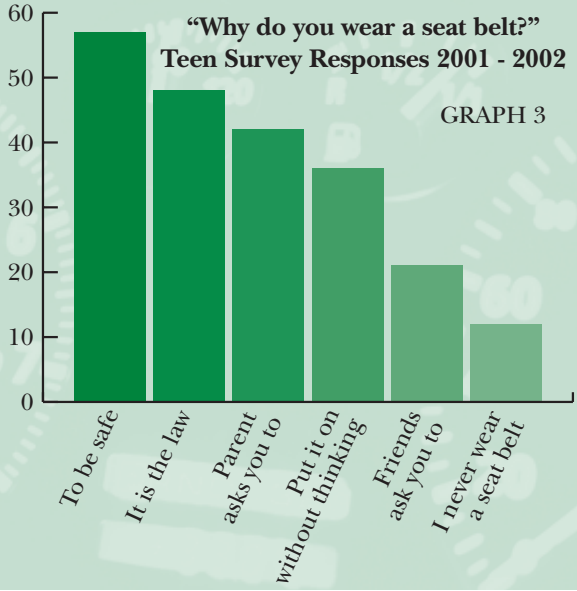
- Belief that accident risk is low,
- Lazy,
- Restraints limit movement,
- Seat belt is hard to find,
- More passengers than seat belts,
- Concern the driver will think seat-belt use by passengers is a reflection of concern about his/her driving.

When riding in the back seat, many said they don't bother with seat-belts, apparently shrugging off evidence that in a crash, rear-seat passengers become projectiles, injuring themselves as well as front-seat passengers.

WHAT ENCOURAGES TEENS TO USE SAFETY BELTS?

Some 44 percent of students surveyed said they routinely buckle up in a vehicle — for them, it's a habit. The most prevelent reason youth gave for wearing a seat belt was "to be safe" (see graph 3 on next page). Asked in focus groups, "What encourages you and your friends to wear a seat belt?" the students responded:

- To be safe
- It's a habit
- Parents make me
- It's the law



Source: High School Student Survey on Seat Belts in six representative South Dakota communities, 2001 and 2002 combined conducted by the South Dakota Coalition for Children

- Seeing law enforcement
- Fines
- Previous accidents or close calls
- Automatic seat belts
- Insurance requirement
- Reminder signs
- Radio ads
- Community promotions

Additional factors that prompt teens to buckle up are seeing bad drivers, when traveling out of town or on gravel roads, when road conditions are poor and at night.

Students understand the value of wearing a seat belt but may miscalculate their ability to put it on in a risky situation. Since three out of four fatal crashes occur within 25 miles from home and 85% of fatalities occur in cars traveling less than 40 miles per hour,[1] the best safety assurance is to buckle up on every ride, every time.

HOW CAN ADULTS HELP KIDS MAKE SEAT BELT USE A HABIT?

Teens across all communities said that parents and family influenced their seat belt use. Youth who say their mothers never or rarely wear seat belts are threefold more likely to report that they themselves never or rarely wear seat belts.

Teens that report their fathers never or rarely wear seat belts were four-and-a-half times less likely to wear seat belts compared to teens who reported their dads always buckle up.

And you thought your kids weren't paying attention!

Parents — moms and especially dads — can make a potentially life-saving difference in their children's lives. You have the power! Keep reminding your kids to buckle up. And — more important — do it yourself!

[1] *National data reported by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.*

South Dakota SEAT BELT LAWS

1. All operators and passengers under age 18 must be buckled up at all times.

2. Children under 5 years of age and weighing less than 40 pounds are required to use an approved child-safety seat.

3. Drivers are responsible for all passengers up to age 17, which means they can be ticketed for not having children or youths properly restrained. This is a primary offense, which means a driver can be stopped for failing to obey this law even without another violation.

4. All adults in the front seat of a vehicle must be buckled up.

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SOUTH DAKOTA
COALITION
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The South Dakota Coalition for Children strives to shape policies and programs to ensure the well-being of all children in South Dakota.

The South Dakota Coalition for Children seeks to insure that the needs of all South Dakota children are met including food, clothing, shelter, nurturing, education, health care and safety within the family and community.

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