

Risk taking behaviour in young people

Communication briefing 2007

1 Project briefing - risk taking behaviour in young people

Young people are always looking for their limits and want to try everything. This is logical, since they still have to discover who they are and what they want in life. The consequence, however, is that young people sometimes take unacceptable risks. This can lead to them being involved in accidents, or even worse, in fatalities. By developing a new campaign the Dutch Consumer Safety Institute therefore aims to make young people between 12 and 18 years of age conscious of the risks they take.

1.1 Injury figures¹

Over 220,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 23 end up in the Accident & Emergency Department (A&E) of a hospital every year as the result of an accident. Of these, over 17,400 are so badly injured that they must be admitted to the hospital. An average of 350 young people each year do not survive the experience.

Men in this age group are more likely to take risks; they are involved in 64% of all accidents.

This is slightly more than the average among the total population (59%).

Types of accidents

37% of all accidents are home and leisure accidents. 30% occur during sports activities, 17% happen in traffic, 9% at work, and violence is responsible for 5%.

16 year-olds are at high risk for traffic accidents, while sport-related accidents are more likely among 12-15 year-olds. Accidents due to violence increase until the age of 20.

Causes

Injuries among young people occur often as the result of a fall (41%). Falling from a scooter, motorcycle or bicycle is at the number 1 position with 10%, followed by injuries resulting from stumbling, sprains or twists (9%). Approximately a third of the young people are injured due to contact with an object (34%), including collisions between scooters and cars or getting fingers caught in doors. Most accidents occur as the result of very simple things; see the attached accident scenarios in Appendix 1.

In 11% of the cases, alcohol is involved. With alcohol, the chance of injury resulting from a fall (from a bicycle or scooter) is very high: 70%. We can assume that the real number of alcohol- or drug related accidents is higher than this, as not everyone will report this fact in the hospital.

Most accidents occur at a sport facility (24%) or on a public road (20%).

¹ Source: Injury Surveillance System 2000-2004.

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Injuries

Bruises, open wounds and superficial injuries (such as scrapes) on the hands, wrists and fingers are very common. Feet, ankles and toes are also often subject to bruises and superficial injuries. Ankle distortions, such as sprains and twists, are also very common.

1.2 What is risk taking behaviour?

Risk taking behaviour includes not wearing a helmet or seat belt, climbing onto a roof to look cool or sneaking into a construction area.

This behaviour can therefore be either passive (not taking safety precautions, such as wearing a helmet) or active (climbing onto a roof). A general lack of awareness or carelessness is also very risky.

Of course, there are also extremes such as 'car surfing', breathing carbon monoxide on purpose to pass out, self-mutilation and use of drugs and alcohol.

Young people are themselves aware, above all, of the risks of using alcohol and drugs in their social lives.² They also consider traffic to be a risk area. Unacceptably risk taking behaviour is primarily defined as behaviour that is dangerous for other people! The generally held opinion is that if you can only harm yourself with the behaviour, then that is your own concern.

Risk taking behaviour is not always considered to be negative, as it also involves developing an individual identity and discovering boundaries. Considering this, we should promote use of safety measures when engaging in risk taking behaviour (such as wearing a helmet while skating).

1.3 Why engage in risk taking behaviour?

1. Young people are looking for excitement

You are young and you want to experience life! Young people naturally look for excitement and thrills, and primarily want to have a good time.

2. Young people are learning about their limits

In order to develop their own identity, young people experiment with many different things to find out what fits them best and who they are. Finding and expanding their limits is a natural part of this process.

3. Young people are aware of risks, but do not think that they apply to themselves.

² Source: Interviews via MSN among young people aged 12 to 23 jaar (n=142).

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They know that something is dangerous, but they do not expect to have an accident themselves, and are therefore less ready to take safety precautions.

4. Peer pressure

Young people can put pressure on each other to exhibit certain behaviour ('being cool'). Less balanced young people are more likely to let themselves be influenced in this manner.

5. Too little or too much involvement by parents

Parents play a special role in the lives of young people. If they are too little or too much involved in their children's lives, the children will be more likely to take more risks. Parents who give a good example and parents who teach their children to be self-reliant can have a preventative role in risk behaviour.

6. Low education

The lower the educational level, the larger the chance that a young person will engage in risk taking behaviour.

7. Alcohol and drugs

If you are not thinking clearly, you are more likely to attempt risk taking behaviour.

1.4 Campaign for young people

This is the first campaign that the Dutch Consumer Safety Institute has initiated for risk behaviour among young people. A previous campaign was geared towards firework safety for this target group, but until now the Consumer Safety Institute's priority was on communicating to parents of young children and senior citizens. This campaign marks a change in this priority.

The campaign must run through 2008 and 2009, and will consist of 2 flights. In the first year, awareness and attitude change will be given priority. Young people must be able to assess which consequences can result from certain behaviour. This includes that you cannot earn extra money with a summer job if you have broken your foot in a skateboarding accident. They should also know that they can limit risks or injuries by taking precautionary measures, such as wearing protective gear while playing sports. It is also important that they view these measures positively and that they approve of the attention being given to this subject.

In the 2nd campaign year, we wish to concentrate on behavioural change. This briefing concerns only the first campaign year.

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1.5 Target group

Young people aged 12-18 years, with a preparatory secondary vocational education (vmbo) tend to underestimate the chance that they will be involved in an accident, and therefore have little interest in injury prevention, especially in aspects of everyday life such as sports and traffic. Risk taking behaviour such as self-mutilation or car surfing catch their attention, but are not a subject of concern for most young people. Alcohol use and the risks pertaining to their social lives are closer to their own experiences.

1.6 Campaign content

Young people must be made aware of the risks of being involved in an accident, especially the very common (dumb) accidents, such as traffic and sport or gym accidents, during free time or at school, work or internship; the accidents that can happen at any time.

Of course, these are not as interesting for young people, so we must find a balance between behaviour that young people consider to be more risky, such as showing off, experimenting, being bored, exploring limits, being angry, and use of drugs and alcohol in the campaign. But the real main goal is to prevent injuries due to everyday accidents.

1.7 Tone

Believable. Real and authentic. Exciting. Positive.

Think about what you are doing and how you do it while you are discovering what the world has to offer.

Let young people find the answers themselves; teaching doesn't work. You take risks consciously, you are your own boss.

1.8 Assignment description

Develop a creative strategy to increase awareness of risk taking behaviour among young people, and a 'resource-free' idea.

In the 2nd instance, we wish to work towards an Internet platform and promotion for the platform coupled to a television programme. The programme will be developed by MTV. Podium publishing will develop lesson materials for the campaign theme for preparatory secondary vocational education schools.

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1.9 Secondary conditions

- The campaign idea must be easy to adapt by the other parties (MTV and Podium). Noise will monitor the concept, but all parties will work directly for the Dutch Consumer Safety Institute.
- Materials should be executed in the house style of the Consumer Safety Institute. This is less important for the campaign, except for the use of the logo and our character font Univers.
- The campaign will be 'pre-tested' by Ruigrok Netpanel. Changes resulting from the pre-test must be considered in the budget.

1.10 Planning

Briefing	Week 23
Debriefing	Week 25
Concept presentation	Week 28
Set further planning schedule	Week 28

Desired start for the campaign: start of 2008 (to be determined in mutual agreement).

1.11 Budget

TOTAL	
Strategy/concept	
Internet - webgame	
TV programme (MTV)	
Promotional materials incl. Media	

All amounts are stated in Euros. Funds may be shifted between the posts in mutual agreement. The amount is task-setting and does not include VAT, based on purchase with charitable discount (to be negotiated), re-investment of return commission and including the costs of the media bureau.

Dutch Consumer Safety Institute
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