

## SMART STEPS TRAFFIC PLAY MAT

The *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat* has been designed and included in the *Smart Steps* program to encourage children to explore the traffic environment. Through creative play using the play mat, children can apply and enhance their road safety knowledge.

Using Western Australian road signage, the vinyl, water resistant play mat captures

a street scene with vehicles, road signs and other features children may see and experience around their neighbourhood.

This information sheet supports and provides some suggestions on how the *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat* can be used in an early childhood setting to foster road safety knowledge and understanding.



# INTRODUCING THE PLAY MAT



Guide children in the way that they interact with the play mat. Show children the features on the play mat and encourage them to follow the road signs, engaging respectfully with others and the resource as they play.

## Consider the following when introducing the play mat to children.

- **Provide an overview of the play mat in group time or with a small group of children.** Explain the purpose of the play mat and the features in the traffic scene. Give simple ideas on how the children could interact with the play mat.
- **Point to specific features on the play mat and engage in intentional teaching** introducing key messages about road safety appropriate for the developmental age of children.

- **Read an Izzy road safety story – (Izzy in the City, Izzy at the park and Izzy on Holiday).** Use the story as a 'trigger' to discuss road safety key messages. Ask children to spot Izzy on the play mat and talk about how Izzy is keeping safe when engaging in the traffic environment. These storybooks are part of the *Smart Steps* resources offered to educators attending a *Smart Steps* professional development workshop or available to download from [www.sdera.wa.edu.au/](http://www.sdera.wa.edu.au/).
- **Read *That's the sound the street makes* written by renowned Australian author Danny Katz.** Talk to children about the sounds that they hear when they are in a car, riding their bikes or walking in the neighbourhood. This storybook can be purchased from the SDERA website via an order form or downloaded via the free apps from iTunes or Google Play.



- **'Tune in' to how children interact with the play mat.** Listen to their conversations and watch and document how they play. Use this information to make decisions on how to embed road safety education into daily teaching and learning.
- **As children are playing with the play mat ask questions about how they are interacting with the traffic scene.** This will encourage their thinking and decision making about road safety. For example:
  - » *Izzy is crossing the road. What does Izzy need to remember to do before he crosses the road?*
  - » *What are the cyclists and the children on scooters doing to make sure they stay safe in the traffic environment?*
  - » *Can you show me a road sign on the play mat? What does this road sign tell us to do? Why do we have road signs? What happens if we don't follow the message the road sign is telling us?*

# USING THE PLAY MAT

Create an engaging indoor learning environment using the play mat that encourages children to build their knowledge and understanding of road safety messages through meaningful play.

- **The play mat can be used on a table or on the floor.** Allow space for children to move around the play mat driving their cars through the whole traffic scene. Removing chairs from around a table top can help children to move freely around the entire mat.
- **Add additional features, a few at a time, to the play mat to build children's interest.** When introducing these features (eg

little people, rubber-wheeled cars, small plastic trees etc) talk about how adding them can make the traffic environment busier and that drivers, riders and pedestrians need to be aware of this and make the safest decisions they can.



# PRACTICES TO EMBED ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION

To promote road safety education and the use of the *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat*, consider the following practices.

## RESPONSIVENESS TO CHILDREN

Support those children interested, to play with toy cars or trucks and plastic people on the *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat*. During the play time, encourage the children to 'drive' and 'walk' safely following the signs on the road. Encourage children to think about what the signs mean and how they recognise them. Discuss how they know when it is safe to 'drive' their vehicle or the types of 'rules' they should follow as a pedestrian in the traffic environment.

## CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Consider the backgrounds of families and children including how they travel to and from the service and what experiences the children have had with road safety. Provide different learning opportunities for children that cater to a variety of abilities and strengths. Consider the setting of the service in the context of the local community eg railway lines and crossings, rural settings, highways, inner city, etc. Discuss this in the context of the *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat* eg What do we see in our neighbourhood traffic environment that is not on this play mat?

## LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Establish a learning environment that encourages children to explore and engage in a traffic environment eg *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat*, trucks, cars, building blocks, traffic signs. Recognise and take advantage of the 'teachable moment' to reinforce key road safety messages.

## ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Use conversation as a way to identify individual children's knowledge and understanding of road safety and the key concepts relevant to their developmental stage. Ask questions such as: *What do you need to remember before you cross the road? Why do children need to hold an adult's hand when walking across the road?* Ask these questions while watching children interact with the *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat*.

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Set up a traffic environment using the *Smart Steps Traffic Play Mat*. Encourage students to 'follow the road rules' using traffic signs on the mat and toy cars, trucks, trains and bicycles.



For more ideas on how to embed road safety education into practices within the early childhood setting, explore SDERA's *Smart Steps* eight practice documents: <http://www.sdera.wa.edu.au/programs/smart-steps/smart-steps-resources/>