

ask the children



nsw commission for
children & young people

Young people talk about driving

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People spoke with more than 130 young people around New South Wales (NSW) about their views on driving and road safety. This helped us develop our response to the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority's discussion paper *Improving safety for young drivers in early 2005*.

Where did the young people come from?

We consulted with young people aged 14-19 years through small focus groups held in metropolitan, regional and rural areas of NSW. We spoke with young people in schools, young people attending the Western Sydney International Dragway Burnout nights, Indigenous young people, young people who had their licences suspended and young people accessing youth services. Members of the Commission's Young People's Reference Group also consulted with other young people from their schools and local communities.

Why is driving important to young people?

Driving is a significant part of many young people's lives. It provides a convenient way of getting where young people need and want to go – whether it's for work, study or just for fun.

Having a driver's licence is particularly important for young people in regional and rural areas where there is often limited public transport and long distances to travel. If there is difficulty in getting to work and school for young people, the disadvantaged become more disadvantaged.

"There's no buses or anything around here after 4 o'clock."

For young people in metropolitan areas, driving can be a safer alternative to public transport.

Many young people said that they do not feel safe on trains and buses at night.

Like others in the community, young people are concerned about the over-representation of young drivers in motor vehicle accidents. They agree that something needs to be done to reduce the number of accidents and help young people to be safer drivers.

Driver education

Young people told us they receive little or no education on driving and road safety at school and that they are interested in receiving more. For example, some young people said that there isn't enough education and information on how the licensing system works, the types of offences and what the penalties are.

"I think the other thing that's misleading is that you don't know how many demerit points there are ... so unless you ask you don't know."

Young people have lots of ideas about how driver education could be made appealing to young people. They said it should be included in the classroom from an early age and then expanded on from Year 10. They think it should be practical and hands-on rather than theoretical. Some suggestions were to use driving simulators and to allow young people to watch firsthand how difficult situations are handled by experienced drivers.

“As long as it’s interactive and skills based... we do so much theory, but we don’t get the hands-on experience.”

Young people want to have driver education programs presented not only by teachers, but people with knowledge and experience, such as police officers or people who have been involved in accidents. They also suggest that having young people of a similar age presenting to them would be interesting and more relevant to their experiences.

“Other youth from our community, older ones, who lost their licence or got points taken.”

Young people also think that public road safety education campaigns need to be made more relevant to young people. Young people told us they want to have input into the design of campaigns. They suggest that this could be done by supporting young people to create their own campaigns or by getting the campaign designers to talk with young people about their ideas.

“... if it’s coming from youth, the youth are going to listen, they are not going to listen to someone in a suit and tie who sits in an office all day. If they hear it from us, they’ll understand it better.”

Driving experience

Young people also said that having supervised driving experience is really important to help them develop their driving skills.

“50 hours is enough to teach you how to drive, but it’s not enough experience.”

They acknowledge they need more than just lots of driving hours – they also need practice driving in different environments, such as heavy traffic, highways, at night or in rain.

“As long as this includes some night driving and wet weather driving where possible.”

“Because young people usually want to go out at night and so they would need good night time experience.”

However, many young people find it difficult to gain their licence because they don’t have parents to provide driving supervision.

“It costs a lot to be a safe and experienced driver.”

Young people gave a number of reasons why they can’t get enough hours of supervised driving experience in different conditions. Some young people said that their parents don’t have their licence, their family doesn’t have a suitable car for learning or their parents don’t feel confident supervising them in difficult conditions.

“The day I got my Ps I went driving at night and it was torrential rain and I was scared, my Mum didn’t let me drive when it was raining.”

Young people want their parents to be involved in their driving practice and suggest that more information and education needs to be given to parents to help encourage their involvement.

Even where young people are able to learn from their parents, many said it helps to have at least a few professional driving lessons. They said that professional lessons can help to break bad habits or clarify aspects of driving that parents may not be confident about.

“Need to drive with different people, because you learn your Dad’s bad habits.”

However, many young people said they couldn’t afford the cost of professional driving lessons. In rural areas, young people said it can be difficult to book driving lessons because of the limited number of driving schools.

“We all need the experience and out of school driving training is pretty expensive.”

Young people suggest that incentives could be introduced to encourage young drivers to undertake supervised driving. These might include vouchers for car repairs, discounted driving lessons or discounted licence fees.

They suggest that professional driving lessons could be subsidised or young drivers could be given some lessons free.

“If you did so many hours you were entitled to do free hours with a driving instructor.”

Young people like the idea of having driving programs for young drivers where they can gain driving experience and learn positive driving practices.

“We all need as much practice in a safe environment.”

They have ideas about how such programs can be suited to young people’s needs. Young people said programs should focus on teaching safe behaviour, as well as improving their knowledge of dangerous situations and attitudes.

“Not about teaching people how to control a car at 150kms. Like, take every opportunity to remind them they are dealing with something very, very dangerous. If it’s done right, it doesn’t necessarily give people over-confidence.”

Young people said that driving programs should cover situations that they commonly experience when driving in their areas.

“As long as it covered things that were relevant to that area, eg. country distances, driver fatigue, road conditions.”

Driving restrictions

Young people said they don’t want restrictions on driving that punish all young drivers.

Young people told the Commission that restricting young people’s driving, such as not allowing them to drive at night, will impact on them negatively. They said that restrictions on driving will also restrict many young people’s access to work, study and social activities. This is a particular concern in rural and regional areas, where access to transport is limited or non-existent.

“No, we have jobs ... and other fast food places don’t shut until 10.00 to 12.00 depending on the store.”

They also said that it is important to have exemptions for any restrictions so that individual situations are taken into account.

“What about designated driving, emergencies, family commitments and energy conservation?”

Young people think it’s unfair that all young drivers might be punished because of a minority. Young people think that having rewards for good drivers is a better idea than punishing all young drivers.

“Yes, I like this idea because it rewards the young drivers who have no offences, whereas most of the new laws and policies introduced punish all young drivers for a minority of offenders.”

Licensing

Many young people are in favour of a graduated licencing system that gives them time for learning to drive with some restrictions while they practice.

“You need to practise by yourself to get experience – that’s when other factors come into play, that’s when it gets more dangerous.”

However, young people said there should be thorough testing for gaining a Provisional Licence and moving to the next licence stage. They said that tests should focus on hazard perception and defensive driving rather than on basic driving skills.

“Am I a better driver for having done this test? No, I am still the same person I was before, but with a different coloured P.”

Many young people also said that the licensing system should be modified so that moving to the next licence stage is seen as a reward for good driving, such as a period with no offences. Similarly, they suggest young drivers should move backwards in the licencing system if they commit offences such as speeding.

“Now you can still break the law and are rewarded by moving up to your P2s.”

Young people support suggestions to increase the learning period, recognising that they need a significant amount of supervised driving experience.

However, they think it’s important that young people are given their Provisional Licence at a time when they need to travel to work or study, which is usually before the age of 18 years.

“I need to take my bros and sis to school. I need to travel around and to weekend sports.”

“Young people are being expected to do more and more, but taking away a vehicle makes this really hard (work, school, sports, etc.) also, less time for parents to drive them around (parents focussing on careers, etc.)”

“Our parents aren’t going to drive us around.”

About the NSW Commission for Children and Young People

The Commission is an independent organisation that advocates for the children and young people of NSW.

We work with others to improve children and young people’s safety, welfare and well-being.

One of the ways we do this is by consulting with children and young people about issues that affect their lives – such as driving and road safety.

We are then able to put this information forward to adult decision makers so young people’s views are taken into account.

Want more information?

You can find out more about what young people said during the our consultations on young drivers by visiting our website at www.kids.nsw.gov.au