

*The overall aim of the Safety for Life project is to form part of a comprehensive and broad-based safety curriculum.*

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# Safe as houses? A sniff of danger for 3,000 primary pupils

**E**arly in 1994, 750 children from 22 primary schools in Calderdale took part in a Safety for Life programme organised jointly by Calderdale Healthcare and West Yorkshire Police. Written evaluation by both teachers and pupils testify to its success in raising safety issues, clarifying what the children themselves should do in an emergency, and promoting 'safety' as an effective topic within the curriculum.

The emphasis is on the word 'effective'. Accidents are by far the largest cause of death and injury amongst primary schoolchildren; it is estimated that nationally around 10,000 annually are left with long-term consequences to their health as a result of accidents. It is clear that schools do take safety education very seriously indeed, but it is essential that a comprehensive overall plan, which allows for the growth of ideas, concepts and skills across the age groups, is adopted.

### Active safety

'Being safe' as a concept must mean more than just avoiding accidents. Children need to take an active role in keeping themselves safe. They need to develop the personal skills of judgment, decision-making and assessing risks, and to have the self-esteem and confidence to apply them. Schools have an important part to play in developing these skills and in encouraging part-

nerships with parents, the wider community, and pupils themselves.

Refining the means to this end has taken several years, and the programme is still being evaluated. It began in 1989-90, when Crime Concern researched youth crime prevention initiatives from across the UK and published *Youth Crime Prevention: A Handbook of Good Practice*. One of the case studies led to the development of 'Crucial Crew' schemes throughout the country.

### Ineffective?

These were based on the belief that traditional crime prevention lacked effectiveness, and that the showing of videos such as *Never Go With Strangers*, followed by general talks on crime prevention, did not appear to be taken seriously by the children.

'Crucial Crew' came up with the idea of letting the children experience and participate in a range of realistic situations which were potentially life-threatening or criminal, and could be prevented.

In Calderdale, it was initiated by West Yorkshire Police, who approached the Education Department. The project involved a number of other agencies too (the fire and ambulance services, British Rail, and the electricity and gas companies). At that time I was the Advisory Teacher for Health Education.

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However, even this scheme, whilst well thought out, did not go far enough in terms of the effectiveness of the children's learning outcomes. It was felt that much more work had to go on in the curriculum if children were going to learn and understand the concepts involved. A visit to a site that staged a range of scenarios, whilst enjoyable and no doubt memorable, could only be seen as a 'one-off'. Any input to the curriculum had to address the children's attitudes and develop skills in dealing with situations. This meant a longer programme over a period of time when teachers were able to discuss with children the issues raised and how they perceived situations.

An important aspect, which is not always considered, was to start with the schools and keep them involved right from the beginning. It would have been very easy for us, as organisers, to assume what children and schools needed. In the past, many assumptions regarding children's perceptions and needs have been made without checking out their starting-point. In this case, the same principle also applied to the staff and schools involved. If the work was to be effective with the children concerned, it had to involve the schools and be built into the curriculum.

### Areas of concern

As a result, a small group of Headteachers had a meeting with the Crime Prevention Officer and myself to discuss the project. They all welcomed the long-term thinking of integrating the project within the curriculum, and identified several areas of concern which were affecting their schools and communities. These focused on:

- Theft
- Vandalism
- Fire
- Playing on roofs
- Playing near railways
- Water safety

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Regarding timing, the Heads felt that the early part of the spring term would be the most appropriate, and they agreed to in-service training for the staff involved, and to making time available for planning. Year 5 was felt to be the most important group, since follow-up work could continue into the final year before secondary school. Also, it was felt that 10- and 11-year-olds are easily able to link behaviour with keeping safe. They are aware of personal skills such as

### Summary of the scenarios, 1994 programme

#### 1. BRITISH GAS NORTHERN

A kitchen showing what to do in the event of a gas leak, including how to turn off the mains gas supply, and also how to contact the Gas Board in an emergency.

#### 2. CALDERDALE ROAD SAFETY

An interactive exercise to recognise warning and instructional road signs.

#### 3. CALDERDALE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Dangers in the kitchen are often perceived by young children when it is too late, resulting in many serious injuries and deaths each year.

#### 4. WEST YORKSHIRE FIRE SERVICE

What to do in the event of a fire in the home. The children get a chance to protect themselves from smoke and telephone for the Fire Service.

#### 5. WEST YORKSHIRE POLICE

What to do at the scene of a road accident. The children are the first at the scene of a motor cycle accident, they will be asked to give some first aid and to telephone for an ambulance.

#### 6. BRITISH TELECOM

While not hosting a scenario, BT are very kindly providing tremendous technical support, as well as several real operators to answer the emergency calls received from the children at each 'incident'.

#### 7. TRUCKS AND CHILD SAFETY

Utilising a 13-tonne goods vehicle, the children will be given an opportunity to experience for themselves the size, noise and other dangers of such large vehicles — particularly the danger to cyclists when riding down the kerbside of these vehicles.

#### 8. YORKSHIRE RIDER, CALDERDALE

In addition to transporting the children to the project, Yorkshire Rider will be conducting a lesson to the passengers en route, covering the Bus Safety Code.

#### 9. CALDERDALE HEALTHCARE NHS TRUST

Health Promotion co-ordinated the programme and trained the teachers.

looking ahead, knowing rules and being aware of other people, as well as using support from friends and the effect of peer pressure. It is therefore important that safety education for this age-group focuses on growing up and assuming

An example of one of the five action scenarios in which the children were involved.

### CRUCIAL CREW: 'SAFETY FOR LIFE' 21ST FEBRUARY — 4TH MARCH 1994 GAS SAFETY SCENARIO

The above scenario uses the British Gas kitchen set. This comprises kitchen units, a gas cooker, a window which will open and close, a mock wall-mounted boiler, three gas meters (in a cupboard, an outside meter box, and a semi-concealed box in the ground), a gas fire, and a telephone.

The object is for the children to smell gas using a scratch and sniff pad and then follow all the gas safety procedures. They can open the window, check the cooker, turn the gas off at the meter, etc., and then finally look up the telephone number for gas escapes and make the call to report the leak.

responsibility for one's own actions and behaviour.

Exploring attitudes and discussing feelings around such issues as being in charge, using judgment, making rules and assessing risk are as important as the practical safety skills of how to react in an emergency and learning how to handle potentially dangerous things safely.

### Triggers and scenarios

Eight schools were involved in the first pilot. There would be two strands to the input. First, the police and the fire service would visit each of the schools, and act as a trigger for the classroom work. Once all the schools had been visited, the children would be taken to a central site at Bermerside, where they would take part in a set of five scenarios, in groups of five or six pupils at a time:

- A road accident
- A bedroom fire
- A gas leakage at home
- Prevention of accidents on the railway
- Dangers associated with electricity

Each of these scenarios had a telephone available for use by the children, which was connected to a central control staffed by three 999 emergency service operators. The children were unaware of their presence, and this contributed to the authenticity when they dialled 999! Each call was amplified, so that the other children could listen in to the conversation. The staff that were responsible for the scenario could then advise on the correct procedure when making an

emergency call to the various services.

The children were transported to the site by the Yorkshire Rider bus company free of charge. This gave the Yorkshire Rider staff an opportunity to talk to them about the problem of vandalism on buses.

The children wrote and drew about their experiences. Judging from their response, the visits by the police and fire services to their school, and their trip to Bermerside, left a marked impression on them. They had to recall some of the information, and apply it to the situations in which they were involved: this proved particularly useful in the fire scenario, where they had to describe and act out what they would do if they were trapped in their bedrooms.

### Buttons

Inadvertently the fire service had provided a dial telephone rather than the push-button type, and many children asked where the buttons were! They also learned a fact that some of them had not realised, which was that emergency calls can be made from a pay-card kiosk even without a card.

The whole process was reviewed by analysing questionnaires filled in by the staff, who also took part in a meeting to discuss the project and consider issues that had arisen and how the scheme might be improved. A part of one of these evaluations is shown on the next page. The request for some elementary first aid to be included within the course was also made by other teachers.

Many children also wrote to the various services, thanking them for the time and effort they had put in, and emphasising how much they had enjoyed the work.

This pilot scheme, involving eight schools, took place in January-February 1993. In February-March 1994 it was repeated with 22 schools, after a twilight session for staff to discuss the curriculum planning, preparation and content. The events for each school's visit are shown in the box on the opposite page.

Each of the first five scenarios in the box was planned to last for fifteen minutes, including a few minutes at the end for questions. The groups then re-formed at the end for the trucks and child safety presentation (item 7 in the box).

### Handbook

Before the second phase of the project, in early 1994, a substantial handbook had been

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prepared. This contains worksheets on road accidents, dialling an ambulance, gas leaks, home fires and hazards in and around the home, and includes the following summary of what the project is about:

*The project aims to provide the children with a stimulating 'hands-on' experience, through which they will develop an appreciation of the concept of safety. This experience will, it is hoped, be enjoyable for all concerned, whilst keeping in mind the tragedies which all too often befall our children.*

*The overall aim of the project is to form part of a comprehensive and broad-based safety curriculum. The day's events are intended to reinforce previous input and provide a starting-point for new topics that will focus on attitudes and personal skills as well as practical ones.*

At the time of writing, plans are going ahead for the 1995 'season'. Every primary school in

Part of a class teacher's evaluation sheet.

Follow up work in school

How did you follow up the work after the school visits?

Drama based on role play around - buildings being on fire  
- 999 calls  
Descriptive writing + drawing - being in a risky situation  
of 'kief' - being persuaded  
Accounts + thank you letters of Bernerside trip Porters to warn of danger.

Which areas did you cover in your work?

Favourite people → trust - who you can + can't  
safe places → what to do in a risky situation

Fire - things to do + not do  
How it felt to be a victim of theft. Observation + recall

How have you evaluated the work?

Through observation in the scenarios and drama  
Through written work where children evaluated their own learning  
Through art work - posters.

The Site visit

what did you think of the visit?

Excellent

What aspect of the visit did you feel was most useful?

The opportunity for children to role play in a very real (for them) situation.

Least useful?

What did you think of the organisation?

Very good.

Which set did the children enjoy most?

The accident

How would you change the visit if it were to be repeated?

Have a demonstration of how electricity arcs in the electricity area, more action for the children.  
Have the gas & electricity in separate rooms.

Calderdale is being invited to participate in a 3-year rolling programme, involving 11 agencies and about 30 schools in each year, a total of about 3,000 children. This means, unfortunately, that some pupils will not experience the project until 1997, but the fact that so many organisations are prepared to commit themselves to this long-term venture is a reflection of the success of the first phases of the scheme. I am also certain that the publicity and 'grapevine' will promote a review of the safety education programme in many other schools. I should be delighted to hear from any other colleagues that have developed, or are thinking of embarking on, similar strategies.

### 'Safety' as a curriculum topic

John Balding writes:

Safety in its many forms has always been high on the list of priorities for parents, school staff, and the pupils themselves. For example, results for the nationwide primary health topics survey involving over 28,000 individuals, based on our *Just A Tick* questionnaire and published in 1989, showed 'safety in traffic' coming first in its group of 22 topics for all parents, teachers and health care professionals surveyed.

The table presents these results in more detail for years 3-6.

	Curriculum topic (out of 22)			
	Safety at home	Safety in traffic	Water safety	First aid
Parents	12	1	2	17
Teachers	7	1	2	31
HCPs*	8	1	5	22
Boys				
Year 3	5	7	2	8
Year 4	6	7	2	7
Year 5	8	7	4	6
Year 6	7	8	4	5
Girls				
Year 3	4	12	5	3
Year 4	5	10	4	3
Year 5	5	15	4	2
Year 6	5	20	4	2
* Health care professionals				

The report, *Health Education Priorities for the Primary School Curriculum*, and its companion volume, *Parents and Health Education*, can be purchased from the Unit for £5.00 each.