

# ...a pound of cure

## Teen drivers – a shared responsibility

**Debbie Friedman**  
Director  
MCH Trauma

Trauma continues to be the leading cause of death and disability in children, teens, and young adults. And in the field of trauma, after the fact is often too late. Split second impulsive decisions can result in life altering events that impact the person involved, as well as family, friends and community.

Teens are identified as a high-risk trauma category. They are at a stage where they usually want to assert their independence, have more privileges, and make their own choices. Sometimes they have an attitude of invincibility and want to experience the thrill of the moment, without necessarily considering the consequences. For many, peer acceptance and respect is more important than anything.

From a trauma and injury prevention perspective, our challenge is to find a way to encourage teens to develop a sense of responsibility, demonstrate sound judgment, and ultimately make smart choices, while offering them the autonomy they need to reach their goals.

An area of particular concern to those of us working in trauma care is road safety. As a teen, what better way to feel independent than by being able to go for a drive with friends on a warm summer evening. In recent months, news reports have been filled with tragic accounts of serious injuries and fatalities related to car crashes and collisions with motorists, passengers, pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. Some of these events have involved drugs and alcohol, while others have involved driving at speeds that exceed the legal limits, or not wearing seatbelts.

In response to the severity of these tragic events, and the devastating effects they have had on so many adolescents' lives, the Trauma Programs of The Montreal Children's Hospital will be embarking on a road safety program in conjunction with the Think First Quebec Foundation this fall. The objective is to sensitize children, teens and their parents to important topics related to road safety, identify important risks, and encourage smart choices with respect to preventing injuries.

**OUR MESSAGE TO PARENTS IS SIMPLE: WHEN YOU HAND OVER THE KEYS TO THE CAR, KNOW THAT YOUR TEEN IS REALLY READY TO BE ENTRUSTED WITH THEM. REMIND THEM TO NEVER DRINK AND DRIVE, ADHERE TO THE LEGAL SPEED LIMITS AT ALL TIMES, STAY OFF CELL PHONES WHILE DRIVING, AND ALWAYS BUCKLE UP AND MAKE SURE OTHER PASSENGERS ARE BUCKLED ALSO.**

For our roads to become safer, particularly for young drivers, we all share a combined responsibility. Teens must be ready to make informed decisions when they take the wheel; parents must offer them adequate guidance; traffic engineering should be safe and efficient; adequate police presence is important; and the promotion of road safety must remain a priority. ■



1

1. Cet article est dédié à la douce mémoire de Craig Watson, fils bien-aimé d'Angeliki Souranis (travailleuse sociale au Centre de traumatologie du Children) et de Doug Watson. Craig, 20 ans, est mort tragiquement dans une collision de voiture, le 10 juillet 2008. This article is dedicated to the loving memory of Craig Watson, beloved son of Angeliki Souranis (Trauma Social Worker at The Children's) and Doug Watson. Craig died tragically in a car crash on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2008.