

## Valentine's Day (or any day) is about Love and Protection

by Cindy Genau

Last week when I was writing this article, it was Valentine's Day. For many that means buying flowers, having dinner out or receiving chocolates and cards. Valentine's Day doesn't have to be about those items nor does it have to be celebrated only one day a year. On any day, love can be expressed by showing care, concern and providing protection. Children bring so much joy to our lives. I believe every parent, grandparent, or child-care provider wants the best protection for their loved ones. The best way to ensure their protection is to make sure everyone is buckled up appropriately in a car safety seat, booster seat, or a seat belt.

Many are not aware that Delaware's Child Restraint Law was updated and now requires the use of a federally approved child safety seat restraint appropriate for the child's age, weight and height through 7 years of age or 65 pounds. From the age of 8 or 66 pounds through 15, seat belt use is required. All children under 12 years old or 65 inches in height are still required to sit in the back seat if there are active airbags in the front passenger seating position. But even the law cannot fully protect our children. We must do more than just follow the law to make sure our children are safe. They must be old enough and tall enough to fit into an adult seat belt and to sit in the front of the vehicle.

Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 killer of children ages 3-14. Most crashes happen as frontal collisions, which mean the greatest forces of a crash are transferred to those sitting in the front. We all would be safest riding in the back seat, but especially children and "tweens". According to statistics reported by the Office of Highway Safety, seatbelt use by "tweens" is extremely low. "Tweens" are those between the ages of 8 and 15. In Delaware in 2005, we had 3 deaths to tweens in car crashes. Only 29% of the times were those tweens restrained. Deaths do not show us the whole picture. Injuries are far more numerous. Injuries can be life-threatening and they also can be so devastating that they are lifelong. In 2005, there were 561 injuries to those aged 8 to 15. That is equal to 46 children injured every month, 11 injured every week, and at least one child injured per day --- all in car crashes in Delaware. The sad part about these injuries is that many could have been prevented if these children had been restrained properly. These tweens were only buckled up 70% of the time.

Booster seats and seatbelts protect tweens from injury when they are used properly. The best way to see if your child can fit in a seatbelt properly is to conduct "the 5-Step Test" provided by SafetyBeltSafeUSA. 1. Does the tween sit all the way back against the auto seat? 2. Do the tweens knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat? 3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm? 4. Is the lap belt as low as possible across the hip bones and not the abdomen? 5. Can the tween stay seated like this for the whole trip?

Show your love every day by protecting your children in the appropriate safety seat, booster seat or a correct fitting seat belt every time you ride in a car - and the back seat is where it is at. For more information on tween safety, contact Cooperative Extension at 302-831-4973.