

CDC Study: African-American teens not buckling up

Holiday season an especially dangerous time for black youth

Special to Sentinel-Voice

More African-American youth are dying in traffic crashes in proportion to other teenagers, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A new CDC study reported that African-American teens are 50 percent less likely to buckle up than their White or Hispanic counterparts. Seat belts increase an individual's chance of surviving a crash by 45 percent.

"Tragically, these statistics show that more of our young people are dying from injuries that could be easily prevented," said Arthur Anderson, director of the California Office of Traffic Safety. "Buckling up — and making sure our kids buckle up — is the single most effective action we can take to safeguard the lives of our young people."

With millions of drivers hitting the roads over the holiday season, safety experts are

reminding parents and kids how important it is to buckle up.

Today, traffic crashes are the leading cause of death to children. Every year, crashes claim the lives of more than 2,100 children and seriously injure more than 300,000. Young adults age 16-25 — the nation's highest-risk drivers — are the least likely age group to buckle up.

"For some people, wearing seat belts seems like old news," Anderson said. "But the fact is nearly 8,500 Americans die each year in automobile crashes simply because they didn't wear a seat belt."

Current national seat belt use stands at 68 percent, and is lower among African-Americans, at slightly more than 50 percent.

"People who don't buckle up may think that their behavior doesn't affect anyone else, that seat belt use is a matter of personal freedom,"

said Janet Dewey, executive director of the Air Bag Safety Campaign. "But the truth is, adult's seat belt habits can have a deadly influence on children."

Crash studies indicate that when a driver is unbuckled, 70 percent of the time children riding in that car are unbuckled. However, when drivers are buckled up, 94 percent of the time the children riding in that car will be buckled up, too. Safety experts recommend that all children 12 and younger ride properly buckled up "in age and size appropriate restraints" in the back seat.

Now with over one million passenger air bag-equipped vehicles entering the U.S. auto fleet every month, there is an even greater reason for drivers and passengers to buckle up.

According to investigations of the 47 children who have died from air bag-related injuries, virtually all of those kids were either improperly buckled or not buckled at all. In a crash, a seat

belt prevents the passenger's head and upper body from moving too close to the deploying bag.

To date, air bags have saved 2,600 lives. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that the combination of an air bag plus a lap/shoulder belt reduces the risk of serious head injury by 75 percent, compared with a 38 percent reduction for belts alone.

"Seat belts are key to safety in vehicles with air bags, and they are also key to safety in vehicles without air bags," Anderson said. "Parents know every child's life is precious. That's why it is up to all of us in the African-American community to make sure that our kids always buckle up."

According to traffic administration, increasing seat belt use to 90 percent from its present level would save more than 5,500 lives and prevent 130,000 injuries annually.

CHILDWATCH

Show children that reading is cool, important

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

James Michael Brodie grew up believing that reading was "cool."

His father, a computer programmer, read the newspaper everyday, and his mother, a homemaker, was always buried in a novel, magazine, or the Bible.

"Our house was filled with encyclopedias, story books and books from different cultures," says James, one of America's most respected children's authors. "There was always something exciting to read in our house. Books took me to places far away from where I was. Lorraine Hansberry, Chinua Achebe and William Shakespeare were some of my favorite writers."

But growing up, James noticed that he rarely saw positive images of himself in books. "I guess I reached a point in my life," he recalls, "when I thought, 'If I want to see myself in print, I'm going to have to do the work.' In my family I saw all these heroes and sheroes, people who were positive examples of what I wanted to be. I wanted to put them on the page."

Brodie also wanted to share his love and knowledge of literature with children and their families. "I wanted kids to see how exciting words really are," he says. "We wonder why young people don't have the knowledge we have. At some point, someone sat me on a knee and read me a story, told me how to behave, how to carry myself. Now it's my turn to pass on that oral and written tradition."

With the publication of "Sweet Words So Brave: The Story of African-American Literature," James was able to accomplish his ambitious goals of putting positive African-

Americans in print and passing on to young people our rich tradition of storytelling.

"Sweet Words," written by James Michael Brodie and Barbara K. Curry, chronicles African-American literary history through the eyes of a young girl and her grandfather. When the young girl pleads with her grandfather, "Please tell me a story and make it sing for me. Draw word pictures...so I can find myself," he answers by taking her on an extraordinary journey filled with places and people who have changed our lives for the better.

Beginning at the tip of Phyllis Wheatley's quill and continuing on to Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize for Literature, this eloquently written book exposes children to the faces and voices of those who have documented our collective life in America.

"Sweet Words" also reveals the influence of our historical,

social and political struggle on literature from Frederick Douglas' call for our emancipation from slavery to Dr. Martin Luther King's call for our emancipation from Jim Crow.

The easy, comfortable prose reads more like a wise elder speaking simple truth than it does a history lesson and is seasoned with historical photos and documents and beautiful original art by Jerry Butler. The book, which is as visually stunning as it is informative, helps African-American children see how far we have come and challenges them to keep working for our continued progress.

Given the great legacy of African-American writers, rappers shouldn't be the only scribes our children know. And what a legacy it is. In a country in which African-Americans were once forbidden by law to read and write, our accomplished scribes have

compiled an impressive canon of poetry, prose, essays, novels, plays and films against tremendous odds. With our words we have won the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature. With our words we have been named Poet Laureates and composed verse for Presidential Inaugurations. With our words we have

changed the conscience and the laws of our nation, for as James acknowledges, "It's still the word that carries the thought."

Our words are a vibrant and powerful extension of our spirits and souls and "Sweet Words" pays homage to the vision and tenacity of talented African-American writers and leaders. Letting our children

see us read and sharing this book with them are great starts to helping them see how "cool" reading can be.

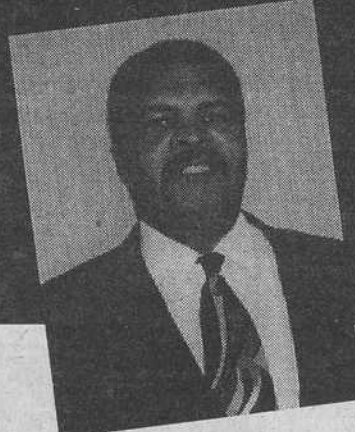
James Michael Brodie is also the author of "Created Equal: The Lives and Ideas of Black American Innovators."

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

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