

Time to change law on seatbelts for young children

Date: 04/03/2007
Words: 351

Publication: The Sunday Age
Section: Extra
Page: 16

YOUNG children are getting hurt in car accidents when wearing adult seatbelts - and it's time for the legislators to step in.

Victoria prides itself on being a world leader in road-safety law reform. But in what seems to be a baffling gap in our laws, and in our ubiquitous road-safety advertising campaigns, parents and drivers are not prevented from putting children over one year old in adult seatbelts.

As Dr Yvonne Zurynski puts it: "It's perfectly legal to restrain an 18-month-old in an adult seatbelt, which is just ridiculous."

It may not be as simple as saying young children are dying because their parents aren't restraining them properly. But the evidence and data paint a worrying picture. Royal Children's Hospital records show that, in the past seven years, of the 52 children under eight its staff saw with major trauma injuries, 75 per cent were wearing an adult seatbelt. And according to the Monash University Accident Research Centre, only 25 per cent of children aged between four and 11 used booster seats, with the rest restrained by adult seatbelts. A 2005 study by the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute found that correctly restrained children had minimal risk of injury in the event of an accident.

Educating parents on the value of using the right child restraint method for the right age - for example, booster seats and harnesses - would help. But it is naive to think that education alone would deliver change in behaviour that is fast and thorough enough.