

THE ROAD SAFETY CULTURE AND THE NIGERIAN CHILD.

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INTRODUCTION

Road Safety continues to be one of the most serious public social issues in Nigeria. It affects everyone, whether you drive, walk or cycle. The aim of road safety should therefore be to reduce the harm, injuries, death and property damage resulting from crashes of road vehicle traveling on our nation's road.

It can be argued that children do not need to know much about road safety and such do not need to have any road safety culture. You will agree that this will be a very STUPID argument. Some of the reason why it is essential that we educate the Nigerian child on road safety is that they are the road users of tomorrow and the illegal road users of today.

The statistics of deads resulting from road accident in Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate despite of the combined efforts of Federal Road Safety Corp, police and other organizations. Road accidents are becoming a major killer in the country, and so it affects most peoples' lives, whether they know and accept it or not. It is a worldwide concern, particularly for young people.

Road safety is an all embracing situation which spells out dos and don'ts and also stipulates consequences and damages in not obeying these rules. Road safety is not the concern of only vehicles or motorized road users. Pedestrians are equally if not more concerned. Today on our major roads I have seen some users whose means of movement are neither pedestrians nor motorized (Roller shoes riders). They are coming in large numbers and the shoes are now everywhere to be bought. Do we have any highway code for them? And they are children.

Many Pedestrians are not conscious of the importance of road safety and the consequence of breaking Road traffic rules, until they run into trouble. Obviously this negligence is costing many their lives, legs, hand, facial structure etc. Since FRSC cannot arrest the pedestrian 'alalok' can and does many times.

The theme of this year's workshop focuses on the Nigerian child. We shall therefore spend more time on this group of Nigerians.

The Child

The Nigerian child is defined as someone below the age of 18, though in Nigeria some people above 25 will still behave as children. The issue of Road Safety will affect these different groups differently. Despite these differences, the Nigerian Child needs Road Safety Culture or tradition.

Children the world over are infatuated about cars and driving. So they are very keen about road issues, but they also have the tendency to do wrong things on the road in the name of fun. The Nigerian child is not an exception. The situation is even worse with our children where cars, and big cars for that matter, are a social symbol and they don't want to be left out of the craze. Those who are not yet driving walk on or across the road without any consciousness of safety.

When we were children, it was required of us to wait by the side and at a safe portion of the road from where you could see both sides clearly, "look left, look right and look left again before you cross the road". This was a ritual that should be applied with caution.

The caveat was that in looking left right and left you should only step on and across the road when no vehicle was near. Today it is common to see people, children inclusive, dash across the road oblivious of the approaching vehicle and sometimes turn around to rain abuses at the driver who narrowly missed knocking him down.

ROAD SAFETY CULTURE

Before we can fully appreciate the importance of road safety, we must understand the very dangers of improper road usage. With the ever increasing number of all sorts of 'things' called cars on our roads, the Nigerian child, the driver of tomorrow, needs know about the risks and dangers of incorrect road usage and thus develop a good road culture and tradition. We need absolutely to inculcate in our children today the proper Road Safety attitude, to reduce the

incidence of accident on our road tomorrow. We should catch them young by example and so we must ourselves know and obey the rules.

I will not spend time recounting all the rules of road safety and the foolish things we do on our roads in the name of driving, but allow me to mention just a few as a reminder. Some of the commonest sins on the road include:

- Over speeding
- No seat belts
- Bad tyres
- Driving after drinking
- Driving without license (drivers license)
- Aggressive driving
- General disobedience of traffic signs and rules
- No indicator – brake lights, parking lights, trafficators, etc.
- Use of cell phones while driving or walking on highways.

These are just a few of the offences perpetuated by road users. Some are more grievous than other and will definitely expose us to greater danger than others.

Safety Education to our Children

Road Safety inculcation should begin at home. We will be surprised how receptive our young children are to many issues of safety. Right from birth human beings develop a sense of safety to protect themselves from accidents. It is a common scene that a 1 ½ year old baby wobble a run at the sound of car or the hoot of a horn. Children must be told or taught what to do and what not to do on the road. When we see people killed, left seriously injured and maimed as a result of road accidents, the child should be warned that the dead, injured or maimed could be him or caused by him now or in the future, that is, he could be the driver.

A friend of mine invited me out for a drink and brought his 4-year old son along. I was very pleased when the little child promptly told me “uncle your seat belt” even before I touched the seat of the car. If I was not in the business of wearing seat belt, I would have been ashamed of myself.

In SPDC, non-compliance with traffic and general safety rules attracts stiff penalties including immediate sack. If a family member breaches any of the offences, the employee (the father or mother) is sanctioned. Maybe we should start punishing the parents for the road traffic offences of their children or wards.

When your child takes the mummy's car or even the dad's official car out without permission and license, what do you do to him when he returns? No matter from what perspective you look at it, an under aged person driving and without license and authority is more prone to accident, than a matured person, who has undergone some driving tutelage.

Speed in driving is a very thrilling thing especially to young children, and driving without seat belt is a culture that many people still have not acquired. Seat belts are instruments of both safety and personality to the user. When you fasten your seat belt, you assume a dignity that raises your ego. At any checkpoint your fastened seat belt sends signal to the officer that you are a responsible person. Oftentimes you are waved on without further checking. Again you will feel much secured when you fastened your seat belt.

Fasten your belt and insist that your child does same and don't use excessive speed so your children will appreciate driving at a good speed.

You should not drive when you drink especially when you are with your children. Exhibit a good road courtesy at all times. It is very common for people to show aggressiveness against other road users and our children pick up this attitude. Explain to your little ones why you thanked that man who stops for you to join the queue.

What to do?

We should take road safety education to the schools as well as the public. Educating our children in Road Safety early will mold the new generation drivers and road users.

Dead to many people is just a statistics that hardly changes their attitude towards road safety. To many too road safety is an unpleasant and boring

subject and it is often forgotten that it affects everybody. Whenever there is an accident we should make it an issue at home and try to analysis what could have caused such accidents and use such discussion session to inform our children about road safety.

- We should also pass through the church, through Sunday school to alert the young minds about Road Safety.

Driving with anger is a bad habit you should show some happiness when driving.

- Appreciate the problem of other Road users and don't fail to draw the attention of your children to such issues whenever the opportunity submits itself.
- Take a drive around town occasionally with your children and draw their attention to the unsafe practices of other road users.
- We can organize road safety plays for primary and secondary schools.
- Sustained campaigns to register in the minds of the children the need to imbibe road safety.
- Beating of traffic lights. When we are always in the habit of beating traffic lights, anytime we have cause to stop at traffic lights, our children will wonder what is wrong with us. And of course the reverse is also the case.

We need to talk to our children right from age 2 about road safety to win them young. You may think that the child does not know what you are doing or saying, but that little brain captures the images of action and retain same till later.

CONCLUSION.

In the past ten years we have not done enough in inculcating road safety tenets in our children. We allow them run wild on the roads and constitute high risk to themselves and other road users

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