5-Step Test

A SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. pilot program through the current California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) project for 2007-09 is developing 5-Step Test* (5-ST) Events to help parents and kids learn together when boosters are needed for safe travel.

Setting up a 5-ST location at a site where families congregate, one reaches those who would never seek booster use information. Parents and kids participate in a demonstration of the process, practicing in a van with and without a booster in place.

To involve the role models for children around the county, state, and nation, SBS USA staff are partnering with groups that can provide teen and/or adult volunteers to learn how to demonstrate the 5-Step Test.

Although 5-ST events are not necessarily linked with booster giveaways, two recent events included that feature. The first was a Kohl’s-funded booster giveaway through Childrens Hospital/Los Angeles. SBS USA enlisted SBS USA Board member, volunteer, and Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Technician-Instructor Lt. Col. Marc Cohen, Civil Air Patrol, to bring 3 members of the Captain Jay Weinsoff Cadet Squadron 3, Van Nuys.

The 3 teens quickly learned the points to be checked and recorded and engaged 105 youngsters between age 2 and age 8; none could pass the Test.

SBS USA doesn’t recommend boosters for 2 year olds and prefers 3 year olds and even older children to stay in safety seats with harnesses for extended periods since, today, many products offer that protection. Nonetheless, it does no harm to teach toddlers’ parents what lies ahead. For older children, learning how to judge if they are properly buckled up in all vehicles allows them to participate in their own protection, setting a pattern to use into their teens.

The second 5-Step Test Event was an annual school-supplies gift program for low-income San Gabriel Valley families with K-12 students, sponsored by Foothill Unity Center. Participants included volunteers from Azusa Pacific University and Foothill Unity Center; donors for boosters, Los Angeles Police Department & CSK Auto; and gift cards from several nearby companies, including Ben & Jerry’s, CA Pizza Kitchen, Cheesecake Factory, Claire’s Accessories, Hot Dog on a Stick, and McDonald’s. Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. lent 2 new vehicles to make it easier to do the 5-Step Test, without and then with a booster.

One older boy’s anguish over needing a ‘baby seat’ was quelled when he saw the neat red Ferrari Ola booster he had won. He vowed to take it to school to show his friends. Only 13 of 213, ages 2 to 12, (mostly over age 9) passed the test. Parents were surprised by the results, but most asserted they would follow through to protect their children.

Booster giveaways in low-income communities come up against the potential for cars made before 12/89 or vans/trucks, before ’91, to have lap belts only in back. This issue must be addressed, for boosters are not appropriate in such rear seats.

With booster use reducing injuries in car crashes for this age group by 59%, compared with belts alone, it was exceptionally gratifying to have boosters for most in this crowd; 151 boosters were donated. The volunteers learned quickly how to conduct the 5-ST and used their obvious people-skills with the families.

A warm, busy day ended with nursing students hoping to engage more of their fellows and professors in CPS and our host asking if everyone would be available next year!

* See www.carseat.org for details of the Test.