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Parents' Perceptions of Child Safety



A **14** Country Study

KEY FINDINGS

- 95 % of European parents report that they personally take measures to avoid accidental injury to their children.
- The top concern of parents with regard to safety of their children: their children being knocked down by a car. This is in agreement with accident statistics which show traffic accidents account for more deaths among children than any other single type of accident.
- The most common response when asked why some parents may find it difficult to protect their children from accidental injury: not being able to watch their children all the time. Lack of awareness or knowledge about the causes of accidents was the second most frequently given response to preventing accidental injury.
- Parents declared a strong demand that products be designed with child safety in mind, and that items that can help prevent childhood injuries should be cheaper so that all can afford them.
- Family and television were found to be the primary sources of information about preventing accidents. The Internet as a source was reported by only 3% of parents.
- Three-quarters of parents agreed that most child injuries can be avoided.
- Two-thirds of parents would like to see more help from the government to prevent childhood injuries.

Source: MORI 2001



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European Child Safety Alliance
PO Box 75169
1070 AD Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Telephone +31 20 511 4500
Fax +31 20 511 4510
esca@consafe.nl
www.ecosa.org

■ Introduction

Injury is the leading cause of death for children in Europe. For children 1 to 14 years of age an injury death occurs at twice the rate of a death from cancer, or 8 times that of a respiratory-related death.¹ Every week in the European Union (EU) another 100 children will die due to an injury. But death due to injury reflects only part of the injury burden. It is estimated that everyday in the EU 14 children die of an injury, 2,240 are admitted to a hospital and another 28,000 receive treatment in an emergency and accident department.¹ Calculations to determine total injury costs in the EU have not been completed, but it has been estimated that the overall socio-economic burden of all injuries in Europe is approximately 400 billion Euro annually – more than 4 times the entire EU budget.²

With a health issue of this magnitude, action for child safety must be taken. As parents are the primary caregivers of children, and those responsible for the health and well-being of children in society, we need to learn more about parents' perception of child safety. This report presents the findings of a fourteen-country study conducted by MORI's Social Research Institute on behalf of the European Child Safety Alliance of the European Consumer Safety Association. The research comprised of a quantitative survey of parents of children aged five or under across Europe in order to better target prevention efforts aimed at educating parents.

■ Background and Objectives

In 2001 The European Child Safety Alliance commissioned Market Opinion Research International (MORI) to undertake a study looking at child safety, specifically investigating parents' awareness, attitudes, knowledge and behaviour towards the prevention of unintentional injury of children.

This research is part of a wider strategy of the European Child Safety Alliance in order to reach the following key objectives:

- to raise awareness of the issue of child safety among European decision makers and European citizens;
- to transfer knowledge and experience of good practices in child safety promotion throughout Europe;
- to promote the wider application of proven safety technologies in coalition with European business and service providers.

Methodology

Interviewing took place in fourteen EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, (Republic of) Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK (Great Britain only).

The research consisted of a quantitative survey of parents of children aged five or under in fourteen countries.

The total sample size of all countries was 2,088. In twelve of the fourteen countries, the research was carried out via Omnibus surveys, where persons were asked about a range of topics. In Austria an 'ad hoc' study was conducted, in which only the issue of child safety was addressed, and in Denmark the survey was conducted among an existing panel of parents (considered to be representative of parents in Denmark).

Country-specific Interviews

Country	Research Affiliate Conducting Fieldwork	No. Of Interviews	Fieldwork dates	Methodology
Austria	IMAS	106	4 – 13 July 2001	Face-to-face ad hoc
Belgium	Gates Marketing Research	114	11 – 19 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Denmark	Socioresearch	103	26 – 28 June 2001	Telephone survey (using a panel of parents)
Finland	MDC Marketing Research Ltd	148	25 – 29 June 2001	Telephone Omnibus
France	L'Institut Français de Demoscopie	105	28 June – 3 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Germany	INRA Deutschland	217	5 – 13 July 2001	Face-to-face household shoppers' Omnibus
Great Britain	MORI	320	5 – 9 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Greece	Market Analysis	126	5 – 24 July 2001	Telephone Omnibus
Ireland	Behaviour and Attitudes	191	10 – 21 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Italy	DOXA	130	2 – 15 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Netherlands	ITC Netherlands	188	9 - 17 July 2001	Telephone Omnibus
Portugal	Euroteste	125	13 – 24 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Spain	DATA	107	2 – 15 July 2001	Face-to-face Omnibus
Sweden	IMRI	108	26 June – 11 July 2001	Telephone Omnibus

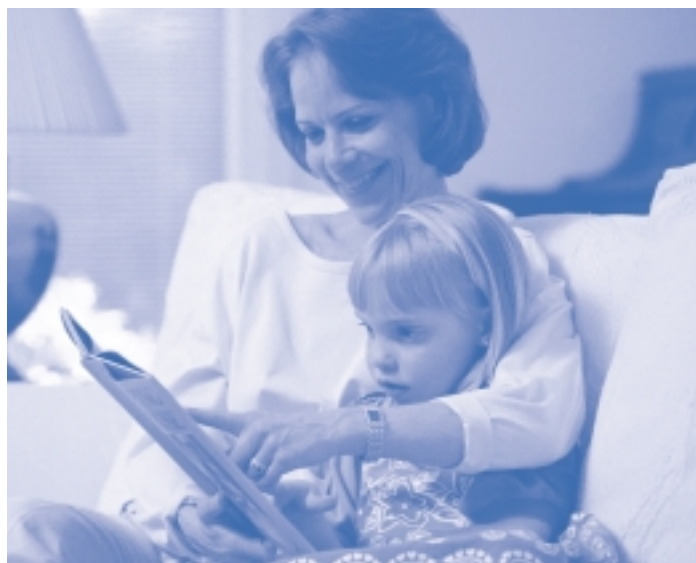
The research was carried out face-to-face in nine of the fourteen countries, but interviewing was carried out over the telephone in those countries where no face-to-face Omnibus was available during the fieldwork period. This difference in methodology is not significant, due to the fact that the interview did not use any long showcards or read out lists, many of the questions were unprompted, and telephone penetration is high across Europe.

The sample sizes in each country vary because of the different country populations from which they were drawn, and the difference in the proportion of people in each country who are parents of children aged five or under.

The data have been weighted within countries to the population profile, and across countries to reflect both the population size of each country, and the proportion of adults living in households with children aged five or under. Because of the relatively low sample sizes (around 100 per country), it was not possible to comment on sub-group differences within a country, but where appropriate, comments are made about sub-group differences across all fourteen countries, relative to education, income, and gender differences.

The questions were formed by reviewing similar surveys of parental attitudes and behaviours in Australia, Canada, The Netherlands, Greece, United Kingdom and the United States.

A limited number of questions were drafted and reviewed by experts in each of the 14 participating countries.



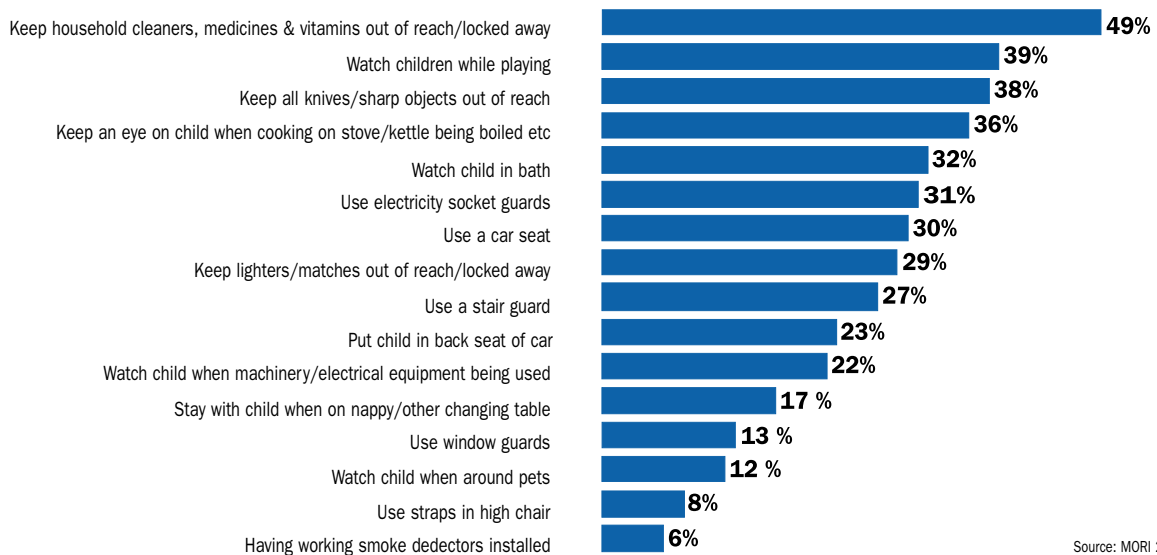
Measures taken to prevent accidental injury

Overall, 95% of all parents of young children across the fourteen countries spontaneously mention at least one thing they do to ensure their children's safety. Half say they keep household cleaners, medicines and vitamins out of reach or locked away (49%). This is the most frequently cited measure when parents are asked what they personally do to prevent accidental injury to their child or children aged 5 or under, even though poisons are relatively low on the list of actual causes of child injury. However, the high mention of this safety

measure could be because medicines and household cleaners are items which parents deal with day-to-day, or it could reflect an awareness that some of the most common household medicines are among the most toxic (for example, Aspirin and Paracetamol). Also, a reason may be the effect of a successful poison prevention campaign.

The wide range of actions taken by parents across Europe in order to avoid accidental injury to their children demonstrates a broad awareness of safety issues. However, much of the emphasis by parents is on supervising or watching their children, even though many injuries to children happen in the parents' presence. This calls for a need for parents to be made

Question: *What, if anything, do you personally do to prevent accidental injury to your child/children aged 5 or under?*



Source: MORI 2001

even more aware of the ever present dangers to their children, and to communicate to their children what these dangers are. It is interesting to consider how parents' attitudes to child safety vary according to demographic factors. UNICEF has found that the risk of child injury death rises steeply with poverty, and the likelihood of a child being injured or killed is associated with single parenthood, low maternal education, low maternal age at birth and poor housing.³

However, looking at sub-groups across the fourteen EU Member States parents with a higher educational level were not significantly more likely overall than those with a lower educational level to mention any of the safety measures. In fact, the less highly educated were more likely than those with higher educational qualifications to say they keep household cleaners, medicines and vitamins out of reach (47% vs. 40%), keep knives and sharp objects out of reach (39% vs. 29%).

The findings also showed that all of the measures more likely to be taken by the high income parents involve purchasing some specific product (e.g. stair and window guards, or a car seat or car), while parents on a lower income who are less able to afford these products were more likely to say they keep an eye on their children when asked how they help prevent accidental injury.

There are also differences in response by gender of parent. For instance, men were more likely than women to say they use a stair guard (32% vs. 24%) and window guards (16% vs. 10%), while women were more likely than men to mention keeping household cleaners and medicines out of reach (51% vs. 46%), or keeping an eye on the child when cooking or boiling water. Perhaps

this reflects the division of labour within households. Of course, it could be simply a reflection of the different things that come to mind for women and men when presented with this spontaneous question, or it could reflect the fact that some education about child safety is targeted specifically at mothers rather than all parents (particularly for younger children).

We can also look more specifically at the responses of parents in different member states of the EU. The table below shows the top three mentions in each country. While there is some degree of similarity between countries (for instance keeping household cleaners and medicines out of reach ranks among the top three child safety measures in 11 out of the 14), there are also some key differences.

Question: *What, if anything, do you personally do to prevent accidental injury to your child/children aged 5 or under?*

TOP THREE MENTIONS IN EACH COUNTRY			
14 country average	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (49%)	Watch children while playing (39%)	Keep sharp objects out of reach (38%)
Austria	Use a car seat (73%)	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach(67%)	Use electricity socket guards (64%)
Belgium	Watch children while playing (56%)	Watch child in the bath (51%)	Keep an eye on them while cooking (50%)
Denmark	Keep an eye on them while cooking (45%)	Use a car seat (38%)	Watch them when electrical equipment being used (37%)
Finland	Watch children while playing (52%)	Keep sharp objects out of reach (39%)	Keep an eye on them while cooking (26%)
France	Watch them/keep an eye on them (52%)	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach(21%)	Use electricity socket guards (13%)
Germany	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (81%)	Use electricity socket guards (71%)	Use a car seat (68%)
Great Britain	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (43%)	Keep an eye on them while cooking (35%)	Watch children while playing (33%)
Greece	Watch children while playing (40%)	Keep sharp objects out of reach (26%)	Watch them in bath
Ireland	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (57%)	Keep an eye on them while cooking (35%)	Use a car seat (51%)
Italy	Watch children while playing (62%)	Keep sharp objects out of reach (50%)	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (46%)
Netherlands	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (46%)	Use a stair guard (31%)	Use electricity socket guards (27%)
Portugal	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (56%)	Keep an eye on them while cooking (43%)	Keep sharp objects out of reach (40%)
Spain	Watch children while playing (42%)	Keep household cleaners/medicines of reach (40%)	Use electricity socket out of reach out guards (38%)
Sweden	Keep household cleaners/medicines out of reach (40%)	Watch children while playing (38%)	Keep sharp objects out of reach (37%)

Source: MORI 2001

Awareness of safety measures in different countries does not necessarily correspond with behavioural patterns. Sweden, the UK, Italy and the Netherlands occupy the top four places in UNICEF's 'league table' of child injury deaths published in 2001.³ Portugal is at the bottom of the league, with a rate of child injury deaths over twice the level of the leading countries. Yet Portuguese parents were as aware as those elsewhere in Europe of many of the dangers to their children – for example, more than half said they keep medicines and household cleaners out of reach. But not all attitudinal statements are necessarily translated into behaviour change.

Note that the Injury Death League Table represents merely a snapshot of the relative positions of different countries at one period in time, and it cannot be taken as the whole story. For example, it does not tell us about change or improvement in injury prevention over time (and neither does it give an indication of the environment in which each country is operating with regard to the safety of playgrounds, traffic congestion, and so on). However, we do have separate figures which reveal how countries' relative positions did change in the years from 1984 to 1993, and interestingly, the EU Member States showing the greatest improvement over this period (that is, the greatest decrease in child injury mortality) were the UK (-47%), Germany (-45%), and France (-41%).⁴

The UNICEF Child Injury Death League Table - Excerpt

Deaths per 100,000 children	
Sweden	5.2
UK	6.1
Italy	6.1
Netherlands	6.6
Greece	7.6
Denmark	8.1
Spain	8.1
Finland	8.2
Germany	8.3
Ireland	8.3
France	9.1
Belgium	9.2
Austria	9.3
Portugal	17.8

Source: UNICEF 2001

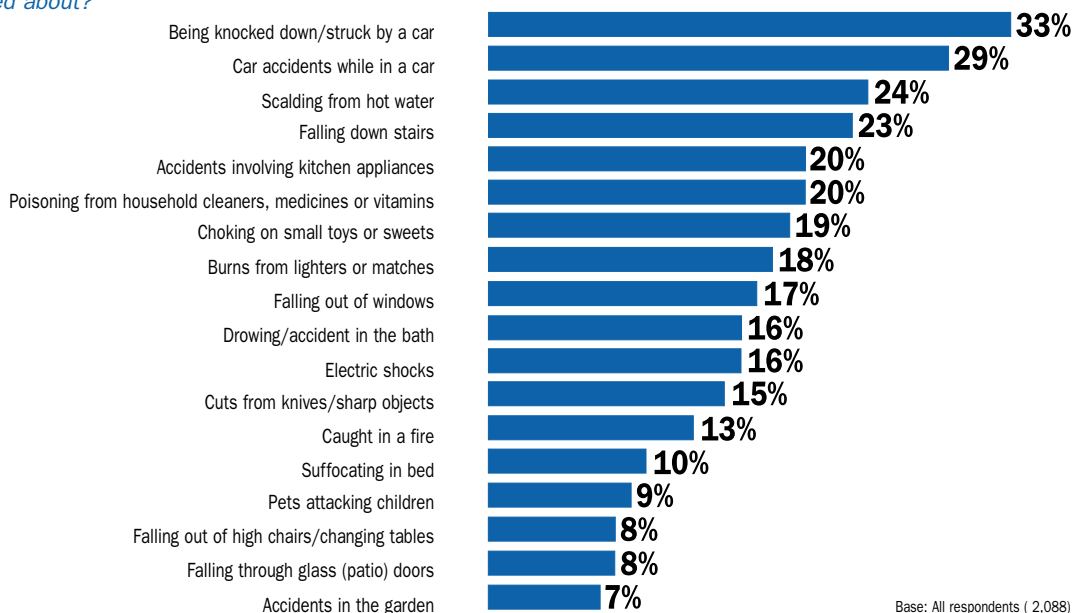
The table shows the annual number of deaths from injuries (unintentional and intentional) among 1 to 14 year old children during 1991-95, expressed per 100,000 children in the age group.

■ Aspects of child safety of the most concern to parents

The primary concern for parents of young children across Europe was the risk of their child being knocked down by a car, with one in three mentioning this spontaneously. This is closely followed by accidents while in a car, cited by 29% of parents. This concern reflects the reality of child injury – traffic transport accidents deaths account for 28% of all child deaths by unintentional injury in the EU, while drowning accounts

for 15%, fire 8%, falls 8% and poisoning 2%.⁵ Although this is the primary concern for parents, only 30% of European parents said they used a car seat, and 23% placed children in the rear seat of the car.

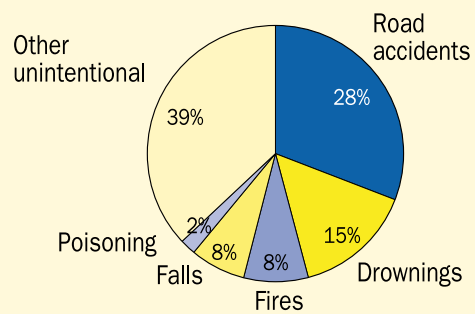
Question: *Thinking about accidents that can happen to children, which if any, health-related risks to your children are you most concerned about?*



Base: All respondents (2,088)

Here is a comparison of parents' perceptions of the most important risks to their children with the reality of the WHO statistics for the leading causes of unintentional injury death among children. Most notably, although car and traffic accidents were the most commonly cited risk to children, accounting for almost three in ten (28%) of unintentional child injury deaths, they made up only 20% of parents' responses. The comparison also suggests that parents should be more aware of the risk of drowning among children, as this is the second most common cause of unintentional child injury death, yet is not among parents' top perceived risks.

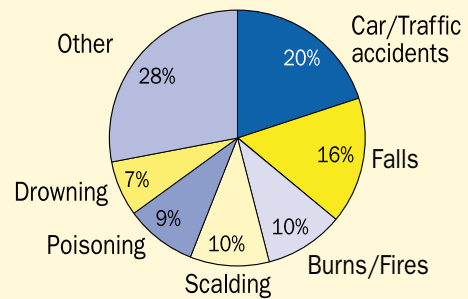
Injury Perception versus Reality



REALITY

Leading causes of unintentional injury death for children (0-4 years) in the EU

Source: WHO, 2000



PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Which health-related risks to your children are you most concerned about?

Base: All responses (4,856)

It appears that parents of children aged 5 or under across Europe were more likely to first think of the immediate risks within their own home, hence they mentioned scalding from hot water, falling down stairs, and accidents with knives and kitchen appliances. It is interesting that drowning (the second most common cause of accidental child injury deaths in the EU)⁵ is ninth on the list of most important concerns for parents, mentioned by 16%. Parents may tend to think of their home as their own particular sphere of responsibility and may assume that safety in public places is taken care of by another authority, but messages also need to be conveyed to parents about preventing accidents to children when outside the home.

The country in which the highest proportion of parents showed concern about road safety is Germany, where 69% say they worry about their children being knocked down by a car, and 60% worry about car accidents while in a car. This is despite Germany performing slightly better than average in terms of the number of child deaths by traffic injury in comparison with other EU countries. However, it may reflect the high profile of road safety campaigns in Germany. Taking a look at legislation in different European countries, we find that Germany is the EU Member State in which road accident prevention legislation is most strongly enforced.³

For parents in Belgium the foremost concern was their children falling down the stairs, which was mentioned by nearly half (47%). This is despite one third of Belgians having previously said that they use a stair guard to prevent accidents in the home.

Worry about children being caught in a fire was highest in Ireland, where more than one in four mention this, around twice as many as in Europe as a whole (27% vs. 13%). We saw earlier that people in Ireland are the most likely to say they have installed smoke detectors in order to prevent injury to their children, and Ireland is also the EU country with the strongest enforcement of legislation regarding smoke detectors.³ However, Ireland is among the top three countries with the highest mortality rate due to fire and flames, alongside the UK and Portugal.⁵

There were also differences according to gender and income of the parents. Those on a higher income were more likely than parents on a low income to mention car accidents while in a car (35% vs. 28%) and accidents in the garden (11% vs. 5%). Perhaps they are more likely than those on a low income to have their own garden and car. However, people on a lower income were more likely than those on a higher income to show concern about scalding from hot water (29% vs. 18%), cuts from knives or sharp objects (22% vs. 14%), and pets attacking their children (14% vs. 8%).

Women were slightly more likely than men to mention a number of concerns, which were all largely kitchen-related accidents and may reflect the fact that women are more likely than men to be in the kitchen with their young children.

Question: *Thinking about accidents that happen to children, which, if any, health related RISKS to your child/children are you most concerned about?*

TOP THREE MENTIONS IN EACH COUNTRY			
14 country average	Being knocked down /struck by cars (33%)	Car accidents while in a car (29%)	Scalding from hot water (24%)
Austria	Being knocked down /struck by cars (55%)	Poisoning from household cleaners, medicines etc. (43%)	Car accidents while in a car (42%)
Belgium	Falling down the stairs (47%)	Car accidents while in a car (37%)	Accidents involving kitchen appliances (37%)
Denmark	Being knocked down /struck by cars (49%)	Scalding from hot water (25%)	Car accidents while in a car; & Falling down the stairs (both 18%)
Finland	Being knocked down /struck by cars (47%)	Car accidents while in a car (32%)	Falling down stairs (20%)
France	Falls (24%)	Burns (21%)	Poisoning from household cleaners, medicines etc. (20%)
Germany	Being knocked down /struck by cars (69%)	Car accidents while in a car (60%)	Accidents involving kitchen appliances (39%)
Great Britain	Being knocked down /struck by cars (30%)	Burns from lighters or matches (20%)	Scalding from hot water (19%)
Greece	Being knocked down /struck by cars (27%)	Falling down stairs (24%)	Falling out of windows (24%)
Ireland	Being knocked down /struck by cars (41%)	Car accidents while in a car (40%)	Choking on small toys or sweets; & Scalding from hot water (36%)
Italy	Scalding from hot water (40%)	Electric shocks (23%)	Falling down stairs (23%)
Netherlands	Being knocked down /struck by cars (25%)	Burns from lighters or matches (18%)	Falling down stairs (16%)
Portugal	Being knocked down /struck by cars (45%)	Scalding from hot water (37%)	Poisoning from household cleaners, medicines, etc. (32%)
Spain	Car accidents while in a car (34%)	Falling out of windows (31%)	Poisoning from household cleaners, medicines, etc. (26%)
Sweden	Being knocked down /struck by cars (46%)	Car accidents while in a car (31%)	Falling down stairs (24%)

Source: MORI 2001

Older parents were more likely to be worried about car accidents while in a car (33% of those aged 35 or over, compared with 20% aged up to 24) perhaps because they are also more likely to own a car.

Comparing individual responses in the fourteen countries, we can see that car accidents in a car, or being knocked down by a car, are foremost in the minds of parents in most countries when asked to consider accidents that can happen to children.

In addition to the 'snapshot' provided by the UNICEF Traffic League Table, it is also valuable to look at change over time. Of all the EU Member States, Sweden has the lowest mortality rates due to motor vehicle traffic accidents, and it also experienced the largest proportional decline in rates in the period between 1984 and 1993, with rates falling by over half (-54%).⁴

Other EU countries that witnessed large declines in the child mortality rate due to traffic accidents were the UK (-47%), Ireland (-44%), Finland (-43%), Germany (-41%), France (-41%) and Denmark (-39%).

The UNICEF Child *Traffic* Death League Table - Excerpt

Deaths per 100,000 children	
Sweden	2.5
UK	2.9
Italy	3.3
Netherlands	3.4
Germany	3.6
France	3.8
Denmark	4.0
Spain	4.0
Austria	4.0
Ireland	4.1
Finland	4.2
Belgium	4.3
Greece	4.7
Portugal	8.7

Source: UNICEF 2001

The table shows the annual number of deaths among children aged 1 to 14 caused by transport accidents during 1991-95, expressed per 100,000 children in the age group.

■ Sources of information on child safety

The most frequently cited sources of information on child safety were television and family (both 31%), followed by friends or other parents (29%), magazines (26%) and books (25%). Health services such as family doctors and health visitors did not feature among the most commonly mentioned sources in many countries, which may suggest that they are under-utilised as sources of information on child safety.

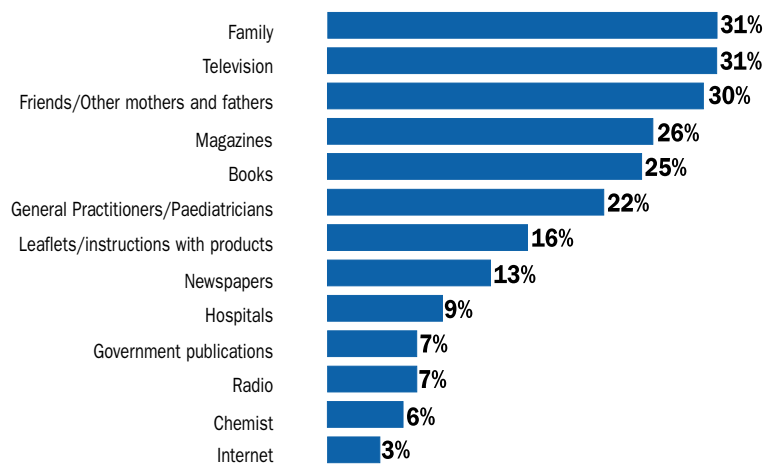
There were, however, considerable differences by country in terms of the most important sources of information for parents about preventing accidents to their children. For example, television was considered the primary source of information by parents of young children in Portugal (51%), Spain (29%) and the Netherlands (24%), and it was among the top five sources of information for all of the fourteen countries.

However, in Germany and France, parents of young children were most likely to mention their own family as a source of information (52% and 48% respectively), with the family also being considered a particularly important source of information in Austria (57%), Belgium (36%) and Ireland (33%).

Friends or other mothers and fathers were the primary source of information about preventing accidents for parents in Austria (65%), Ireland (44%), Belgium (41%) and Sweden (23%), whilst in Great Britain parents of young children were most likely to mention their general practitioner or paediatrician as the source from which they have learned about child safety (33%). The degree to which parents reported relying on medical practitioners for information about child safety varied considerably across Europe. For instance, almost half of parents in Portugal cited this as a source of information, and one in three parents in Finland do so. However, only around one in ten parents in Denmark and France said the general practitioner or paediatrician is a source of information about accident prevention.

There were considerable differences according to income in terms of which sources of information parents of young children use. For instance, parents of a higher income were more likely than those on a lower income to say they use television (34% vs. 26%), and books (32% vs. 20%). Those on a low income were more likely to say they rely on their family (35%, against 23% on a higher income). Similarly, people in the higher social classes were more likely to use books, magazines, newspapers and television, while those in the lower social classes were more likely to say they receive information from their family.

Question: From which, if any, sources have you heard or learned about ways of preventing accidental injuries to your child/children ?



Source: MORI 2001

Men were more likely than women to cite the family as a source of information (34% vs. 29%), as well as government publications (10% vs. 4%) and the Internet (6% vs. 2%). However, women were more likely than men to mention books (26% vs. 22%), and their physician or general practitioner (24% vs. 19%).

Younger parents were particularly likely to say they have learnt about ways of preventing accidental injury from members of their family (42% of parents aged up to 24 say this, compared with 30% aged 35 or over). Younger people were particularly unlikely to have read government publications (only 1%), and no parents aged under 25 in this study say they use the Internet. It was surprising to find that the Internet was mentioned by only 3% of parents across Europe. This must be taken into account when determining information channels for injury prevention campaigns.

■ Obstacles to achieving child safety

The most common response when asked to consider why some parents find it difficult to always protect their children is that it is not possible to watch them all the time (46%). Other reasons frequently given were a lack of awareness or knowledge about the causes of accidents (24%), and that children themselves are contrary and do not listen (20%).

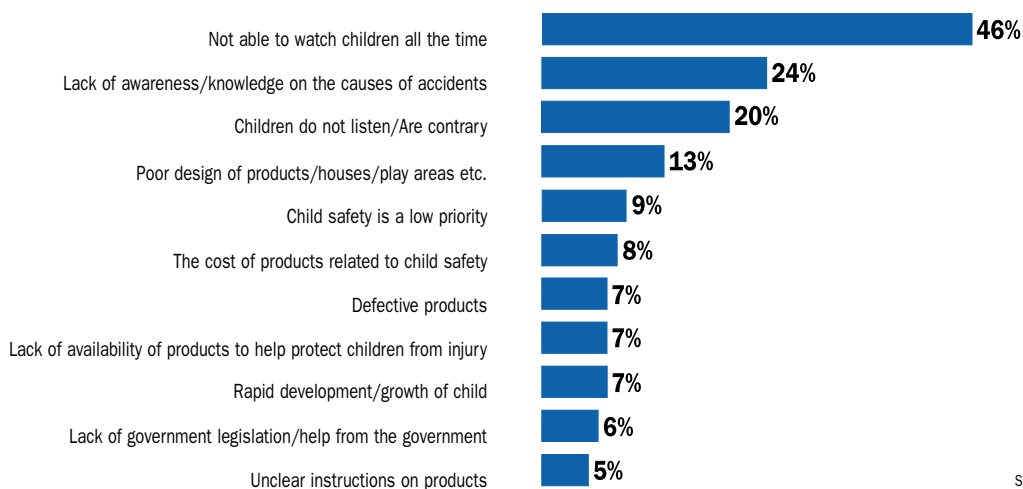
The notion that it is not possible to watch your children all the time was the top mention in 13 of the 14 countries in the study. However, in Greece, parents were most likely to explain that child safety is a low priority (36% say this) when asked why it may be difficult for parents to always protect their children from accidental injury. This is perhaps surprising given the relatively high position of Greece in UNICEF's league table of child injury deaths. The low priority given to child safety ranks among the top three explanations in Belgium and Sweden, and also in France where 21% mentioned 'negligence' as an obstacle to preventing accidental injury.

A lack of awareness or knowledge about the causes of accidents was the second most frequently given response in eight of the fourteen countries, particularly high in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Greece and Ireland, where at least three in ten parents mention it.

The explanation that children are contrary or do not listen was most likely to be given in Austria, Germany, Portugal and Belgium, where it is the response of at least one in four parents of young children. However, fewer than one in ten parents said this in Denmark, France, Greece, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The cost of products related to child safety was particularly likely to be raised by parents in Germany (24%) and Austria (15%), compared with 8% overall.

Question: *What would you say are the main reasons that some parents find it difficult to always protect their children from accidental injury ?*



Source: MORI 2001

Similarly, poor design of products, houses or play areas, and defective products were mentioned more by parents in Germany and Austria than in other European countries.

likely than women to mention the poor design of products or play areas (15% vs. 12%), and the lack of government legislation (8% vs. 4%).

Looking at the profile of parents across the fourteen countries, people on a higher income or in higher social class were more likely to mention the cost of products related to child safety, the poor design of products, unclear instructions on products, lack of help from governments and a lack of awareness or knowledge about the causes of accidents. Those on a lower income were more likely to say that children are contrary or do not listen. There are few significant differences in response by age or gender, but men are slightly more

■ Should more products be designed with child safety in mind?

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that more products and surroundings such as play areas should be designed with child safety in mind. In all countries parents agree with this statement overwhelmingly. Overall, two-thirds of people strongly agree and one quarter say they 'tend to agree', giving a total of nine in ten parents in Europe who think that more products and surroundings should be designed with child safety in mind. Only 3% disagree and 5% were neutral.

Groups within the total population who were more likely to agree that more products and surroundings should be designed with child safety in mind include women, parents on a low income, and those with a lower educational level (all 92% agree).

■ Should items that can help prevent childhood injuries be cheaper?

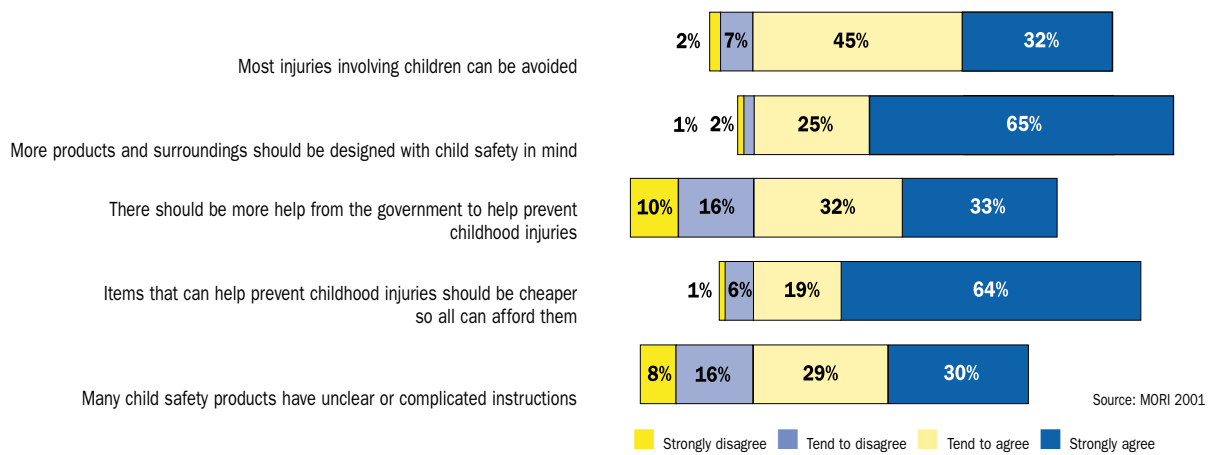
The majority of parents in all of the fourteen countries agreed that items that can prevent childhood injuries – such as car seats, stair guards or bicycle helmets – should be cheaper so that all can afford them. Almost two-thirds of people strongly agreed (64%), and a further 19% tended to agree. Fewer than one in ten people disagreed that these items should be cheaper. Parents aged up to 24 (91% agree), those on a low income or with lower educational level (89%) and women (86%) were more likely to agree that items such as car seats, stair guards or bicycle helmets should be cheaper.

■ Do child safety products have unclear or complicated instructions?

More than half of parents of young children across Europe (59%) agreed that many child safety products have unclear or complicated instructions, including three in ten parents who strongly agreed. Around one quarter disagreed (24%), while 14% were neutral.

The countries in which people were most likely to agree that child safety products have unclear instructions are Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain – in each of these, more than three in five people agreed with the

Question: *Could you please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*



statement. Parents of young children in these countries (excluding Ireland) were also the least likely to cite the leaflets or instructions that come with products as a source of information about preventing accidental injury to their children. This strongly suggests that there is scope for improving the safety instructions of products in these four countries in particular.

Once again, parents across all fourteen countries who had a low income, a lower educational level, or were in a lower social class were particularly likely to express agreement with the statement.

■ Can most injuries involving children be avoided?

Overall, three-quarters of parents of children aged 0 to 5 agree that most injuries involving children can be avoided (77%, including 32% who strongly agree). Only one in ten disagreed, and a further one in ten parents were neutral.

The European country in which parents were most positive about the scope for avoiding child injury is Portugal, where nine out of ten people agreed that most injuries involving children can be avoided, and only 3% disagreed. Other countries in which parents were particularly positive about the potential for improving child safety were Spain, France, Finland and Italy, where at least four out of five agreed that most child injuries can be avoided.

There were no significant differences in opinion by age or gender of parent. However, parents of young children on a low income were slightly more likely than those on a higher income to agree that most injuries involving children can be avoided (82% vs. 75% agree).

■ Should the government help more to prevent childhood injuries?

Overall, two-thirds of parents across Europe agreed that there should be more help from their government to prevent childhood injuries, including one-third who agreed strongly. One in six people disagreed (17%), while a further one in six were neutral (16%). Parents in Portugal and Spain were the most likely to agree that there should be more help from the government to help prevent childhood injuries (83% and 81% respectively), while those in Finland, Ireland and Greece were also particularly strongly in agreement. In contrast, fewer than half of parents in the Netherlands and Denmark thought the government should spend more money on preventing childhood injuries (42% and 35% respectively). In both of these countries, more people disagreed with the statement than agreed with it. It is possible that people in certain countries are more likely than elsewhere to consider the tax implications of extra government help for child injury prevention, which makes them less likely to support the idea, or it may be that people simply believe child safety should be the sole responsibility of parties other than the government (for example, parents themselves). Once again, people on a lower income were more likely to agree with the statement, as were those in the lower social classes (both 72%).

Conclusion

Taken altogether, the responses of European parents of young children indicate a broad level of awareness of child safety issues across Europe, but one which varies considerably in different countries. The vast majority (95%) of parents report that they do personally take measures to avoid accidental injury to their children. The findings suggest that awareness of safety measures among European parents of young children is high. However, while there are some things over which parents have control and can take protective measures (for example, keeping medicines out of reach), there are also several reasons why parents may feel helpless to protect their children – a combination of environmental factors, a lack of awareness, or the prohibitive price of safety products.

This helplessness is reflected in parents' top concern with regard to the safety of their young children, that of their children being knocked down by a car. This is in agreement with the reality of statistics for child deaths by injury, where traffic accidents account for more fatalities among children than any other single type of accident. It is noticeable that, other than traffic accidents, parents were most likely to cite concerns about child safety which are related to dangers in the home. However, parents point out the reality of not being able to watch children all the time. This was the most common response when asked why some parents may find it difficult to protect their children at all times from accidental injury. Lack of awareness or knowledge about the causes of accidents was the second most frequently given response to preventing accidental injury. It is clear that child safety is not the responsibility of

parents alone. These findings point to the need for a variety of organisations and governments to be involved in child safety initiatives.

In particular, parents declared a strong demand that more products and surroundings be designed with child safety in mind and that items that can help prevent childhood injuries should be cheaper so that all can afford them. This is an issue for national governments, in terms of ensuring that safety regulations apply to all their consumer products, and considering pricing schemes for safety products that will benefit the less well-off. There is also a role for manufacturers in ensuring that instructions on child safety products are clear. At present, more than half of parents of young children across the EU believe this is often not the case, with those on a low income particularly likely to say that instructions are unclear.

Most importantly, parents demonstrated a positive attitude towards accident prevention, with three-quarters agreeing that most injuries involving children can be avoided. Family and television were found to be the primary sources of information about preventing accidents (31% respectively), followed by friends/other parents (29%), magazines (26%), compared to leaflets/instructions with products (16%), radio (7%), or the Internet (3%). This should be taken into account when determining information channels for injury prevention campaigns. When it comes to government funding for child safety, about two-thirds of parents of young children across Europe would like to see more help from the government to help prevent childhood injuries. This presents a clear message to governments for widespread support of additional investment in child accident prevention.

■ Recommendations

What is needed?

Now that we have a clearer understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of child safety by parents, we must act on this information in order to improve the safety of children in Europe. Enacting the following recommendations would initiate the process of providing rights to safety for families.

Recommendation # 1

That European and national governments facilitate establishing national and European networks to communicate with parents about the causes of child accidents and what actions they can take to reduce injury risks to children. This should be done by bringing together business, consumers and experts, and by funding initiatives that aim at sustainable structures for ongoing consumer education.

Recommendation # 2

That the European Commission ensures standards and regulations are effectively providing safety for children and families, that they are enforced with strict penalties for non-compliance, and adopted as national laws in Member States. Consideration should be given to pricing schemes, availability and easy access of safety products to benefit families with low-income.

Recommendation #3

That industry and manufactures commit to ensuring safe product design and instructions for use are clear and easily understood. Business should also actively be involved in consumer safety awareness and education programmes.

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■ Glossary and Terms

- **Ad-hoc survey:** A survey created with a specific purpose or task and once it has been completed it is no longer utilised.
- **Omnibus survey:** A survey including or covering many items
- **Upper Middle Class:** Higher managerial, administrative or professional workers
- **Middle Class:** Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
- **Lower Middle Class:** Supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional
- **Skilled Working Class:** Skilled manual workers
- **Working Class:** Semi and unskilled manual workers
- **Those at the lowest levels of subsistence:** State pensioners, etc, with no other earnings
- **Sample tolerance:** Possible variation that might be anticipated because a sample, rather than the entire population, is interviewed/Sampling tolerances may vary with the size of the sample and the size of the percentage results

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LIST OF ALLIANCE MEMBERS

AUSTRIA

Austrian Institute for Home and Leisuretime Safety/
Sicher Leben
Mr. F. Steinbauer
Özeltgasse 3, A-1031 Vienna, Austria
Tel: +43 1 715 6644 320
Fax:+43 1 715 6644 30
Email: franz.steinbauer@sicherleben.at

Grosse Schuetzen Kleine/Safe Kids Austria
Dr. M.E. Hoellwarth
Auenbruggerplatz 34,
A-8036 Graz, Austria
Tel: +43 316 385 3764
Fax:+43 316 385 3693
Email: kinder.unfall@uni-graz.at

BELGIUM

CRIOC-OIVO
Mrs. C. Renard
Ridderstraat 18,
B-1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 54 70 611
Fax:+32 2 54 70 601
Email: carine.renard@oivo-crioc.org

Kind en Gezin (Child and Family)

Mrs. E. Speltincx
Hallepoortlaan 27
B-1060 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 533 1412
Fax:+32 2 534 1448
Email: elke.speltincx@kindengezin.be

DENMARK

National Institute of Public Health
Dr. B. Frimodt-Moller
Svanemollevej 25
DK 2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
Tel: +45 3920 7777 (ext.310)
Fax:+45 3927 3095
Email: bfm@dike.dk

FINLAND

The Finnish National Rescue Association (FINNRA)
Mrs. L. Joutsu
Ratamestarinkatu 11
FIN-00520 Helsinki, Finland
Tel: +358 9 4761 1324
Fax:+358 9 4761 1400
Email: liisa.joutsu@spek.fi

FRANCE

Ministère de l' Économie, des Finances et de l'Industrie
Commission de la Sécurité des Consommateurs
Mrs. F. Briand
Cité Martignac
111, rue de Grenelle
75353 Paris 07 SP, France
Tel: +33 1 4319 5653
Fax:+33 1 4319 5700
Email:Francoise.briand@csc.finances.gouv.fr

GERMANY

Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft
Kindersicherheit
Dr. S. Märzheuser
Heilsbachstraße 30,
53123 Bonn, Germany
Tel: +49 228 98 72 70
Fax: +49 228 64 200 74
Email: stefanie.maerzheuser@web.de

GREAT BRITAIN

Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT)
Mrs K. Phillips
18-20 Farringdon Lane
London EC1R 3HA, Great Britain
Tel: +44 20 7608 3828
Fax: +44 20 7608 3674
Email: katrina.phillips@capt.org.uk

RoSPA the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Mrs. J. Cave
Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road
Birmingham B5 7ST, Great Britain
Tel: +44 121 248 2110
Fax: +44 121 248 2001
Email: jcave@rospa.org.uk

GREECE

C.E.R.E.P.R.I.
Athens University Medical School
Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology
Dr. E. Petridou
Mikras Asias Street, Goudi 75
115 27 Athens, Greece
Tel: +30 10 746 2105
Fax: +30 10 7773840
Email: epetrid@med.uoa.gr

IRELAND

Child Accident Prevention (CAPT)
Child Safety Centre
Mrs. M. Mercer
23 A/B/ Mullacreevie Park, Killylea Road
Armagh, BT604BA
Tel: +44 28 3752 6521
Fax: +44 28 3752 6521

ITALY

Istituto per l'Infanzia IRCCS
Servizio di Pronto Soccorso
Dr. A.G. Marchi
Via dell'Istria 65/1
34100 Trieste, Italy
Tel: +39 40 378 5373
Fax: +39 40 660 919
Email: agmarchi@libero.it

THE NETHERLANDS

Consumer Safety Institute
Mrs. M. Ridder
Postbus 75169
1070 AD Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 20 5114500
Fax: +31 20 5114510
Email: m.ridder@consafe.nl

PORTUGAL

APSI Association for Child Safety Promotion
Mrs. H. Menezes
Vila Berta 7-r/c Esq.
P-1170-400 Lisboa, Portugal
Tel: +351 21 887 01 61
Fax: +351 21 888 16 00
Email: helena.menezes@netc.pt

SPAIN

Ministerio de Sanidad y Consumo
General Directorate of Public Health
Mrs. T. Robledo de Dios
Paseo del Prado, 18-20
28071 Madrid, Spain
Tel: +34 91 596 4167/8
Fax: +34 91 596 4195
Email: trobledo@msc.es

SWEDEN

Swedish Consumer Agency / Konsumentverket
Mrs. L. Strindberg
S-11887 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 8 429 0571 Fax: +46 8 429 8900
Email: lotten.strindberg@konsumentverket.se

AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

EUROPE

ANEC European Association Co-ordination Consumer
Representation in Standardization
Mrs. T. Vandenberghe
Tervurenlaan 36, box 4
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 743 2470
Fax: +32 2 706 5430
Email: tania@anec.org

CESP Confederation of European Specialists in Paediatrics

Dr. A. Nicholson
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, department of Paediatrics
Drogheda
Co. Louth, Ireland
Tel: +35 341 98 37 601
Email: alf.nicholson@nehb.ie

INTERNATIONAL

ISCAIP International Society for Child and Adolescent
Injury Prevention)
Dr. D.H. Stone
Glasgow University Hospitals / Yorkhill Hospital, PEACH
Unit/Department of Child Health/University of Glasgow
Yorkhill
Glasgow G3 8SJ, Great Britain
Tel: +44 141 201 0178
Fax: +44 141 201 6943
Email: dhs1d@clinmed.gla.ac.uk

OBSERVERS

CZECH REPUBLIC

Charles University
2nd. Medical School Center for Childhood Injury
Epidemiology and Prevention
Dr. M. Grivna
Vúvalu 84, 150 06 Praha, Tzech Republic
Tel: +420 22 443 5942
Fax:+420 22 443 5941
Email: michal.grivna@lfmotol.cuni.cz

ESTONIA

Consumer Protection Board of Estonia
Dr. H. Aruniit
Kiriku 4, 15071 Tallinn, Estland
Tel: +372 6201 700
Fax:+372 6201 701
Email: helle.aruniit@consumer.ee

ISRAEL

Hebrew University-Hadassah
Hadassah School Public Health & Comm MedDept.
Social Med, Mother/Child Health Unit
Dr. R. Gofin
PO BOX 12272
91120 Jerusalem,Israel
Tel: +972 2 677 7502
Fax:+972 2 643 1086
Email: gofin@cc.huji.ac.il

NORWAY

Norwegian Safety Forum
Department of Preventive Medicine
Mr. J. Lund
PO BOX 2473 Solli
N-0202 Oslo, Norway
Tel: +47 22 23 4422
Fax:+47 22 44 58 88
Email: johan.lund@labmed.uio.no

POLAND

Jagiellonian University, Medical College
Mrs. M. Malinowska-Cieslik
Institute of Public Health,
Ul.Grzegorzeczka 20
31-531 Krakow, Poland
Tel: +48 12 422 3222
Fax:+48 12 421 7447
Email: mxciesli@cyf-kr.edu.pl

SWITZERLAND

Swiss Council for Accident Prevention/BFU
Mr. Dr. U. Ewert
Laupenstrasse 11
CH-3001 Bern, Switzerland
Tel: +41 31 390 22 06
Fax:+41 31 390 22 30

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EUROPEAN
child
SAFETY ALLIANCE

European Child Safety Alliance
PO Box 75169
1070 AD Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Telephone +31 20 511 4500
Fax +31 20 511 4510
www.ecosa.org

In partnership with

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