

Skate-scooting into Danger

Tan Tam Mei

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If you are from a country where motorists give way to pedestrians, don't assume this is the case in Singapore too, said a sociologist.

It is one thing to let your child be independent on our roads and another to do what is necessary to prevent accidents from happening.

Two weeks ago, a toddler was almost hit by two vehicles after dashing across Bedok North Road.

A parent wrote to The New Paper, sharing her concerns about kids riding skate scooters unsupervised.

TNP then visited Holland Village and Lorong Chuan to observe children on bicycles and skate scooters.

In two hours at Lorong Chuan, we saw at least 10 children on the two-wheelers but most were accompanied by adults as they crossed the road.

Sociologist Tan Ern Ser, an associate professor at the National University of Singapore, said expatriate parents might seem more liberal with their children in terms of road safety because they come from countries with roads that are more pedestrian friendly.

Prof Tan said that parents, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, should do what is best for their children and strike a balance between protecting them and letting go.

One child we observed, Tasha Yeo, knows never to cross the road by herself.

The six-year-old has also learnt that she must stop at the end of the pavement. And she crosses only when the green man is flashing and when all vehicles have stopped.

She got the scooter in February as a birthday present and takes it for a ride several times a week.

TNP observed Tasha and her mother, Mrs Adelind Yeo, on Thursday when they were on their way to Tasha's grandmother's house a few streets away from their home in Lorong Chuan.

Mrs Yeo, 36, a housewife, said: "I let her ride on the pavement because I feel that doing so is fine. But she isn't allowed to cross the road alone as there always has to be an adult beside her."

Driving safety expert Gerard Pereira, 57, said: "I understand that most parents have convenience in mind when they allow their children to ride scooters and bicycles, but they must remember that safety cannot be compromised."

The manager of the Singapore Safety Driving Centre said that as long as a scooter or bicycle is being taken across the road, its rider, whether adult or child, should dismount and push it.

Mr Pereira noted that none of the skate scooter-riding children in photos which TNP took and showed to him adhered to this safety precaution. Singapore Road Safety Council vice-chairman Gopinath Menon, 70, said: "Although following the rules means accidents are less likely, accidents still can happen."

As our roads are not yet bicycle- or skate scooter-friendly, and motorists can be quite aggressive, Mr Menon advises parents not to allow children younger than nine to ride or skate unsupervised.

He said: "As a general rule, responsibility always lies with motorists who are the 'big guys'. But the small guys (cyclists and pedestrians) should also follow the rules and look out."

myp@sph.com.sg

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