

'Most people don't stop to think of the risks involved'

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So far this year, five have been killed, accounting for 27 per cent of all fatal collisions in York.

Another 17 pedestrians lost their lives between 2000 and 2003.

"The numbers do surprise us. We see the devastation this can cause. Most people don't stop to think of the risks involved," said Staff-Sgt. Carrique, adding accidents involving pedestrians jumped this year to the second leading cause of fatal collisions after speeding.

"Crossing the road, it's obviously not done with the intention of getting hurt. But it's what you don't see (while navigating traffic) that's going to get you."

SIMPLE STEPS TO SAFETY

He advised taking simple steps to increase safety such as crossing the road at traffic signals, crosswalks and stop signs, making eye contact with drivers before stepping off the curb, waiting for vehicles to stop before crossing, wearing bright or reflective clothing especially at night, using sidewalks and refraining from wearing headphones while walking or jogging

along roadways.

Although drivers are aware speeding causes accidents, many continue to drive with a lead foot.

Brett Kelly, spokesperson for the Canadian Automobile Association, says speeding was the cause of 22,000 collisions in Ontario in 2002.

"That's 63 collisions a day," Mr. Kelly said from his Thornhill office. "Unsafe speed is the number 1 cause of accidents in Ontario."

At the same time, the safety council reports the 7 per cent of Canadian drivers who don't wear seat belts account for a third of the 3,000 fatalities on roads every year.

Meanwhile, sexual health officials in some communities, including Toronto, warn they are seeing more cases of sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, syphilis and chlamydia among teenagers neglecting to practise safe sex.

The list of dire consequences resulting from dangerous choices goes on and on.

Deciding whether or not to follow the rules or engage in risky behaviour involves a complex process, according to Patricia Scott-Jeffroy, health

educator in the substance abuse prevention program of York's public health department.

Much depends on if the person is a thrill seeker by nature, their age, the activity in question and the dynamics of the specific situation.

A behaviour that someone would avoid like the plague during their daily life could take on a certain appeal while away on vacation, for instance.

ADOLESCENTS TAKE RISKS

Adolescents are often big risk-takers, Ms. Scott-Jeffroy said.

Younger children are more inclined to listen to their parents who spell out consequences for their behaviour.

"Children have enough trust in their parents to believe them." On the other hand, adults have generally learned to think matters through to their logical conclusion.

However, teenagers may start asserting their independence before they have developed the cognitive skills needed to keep them out of trouble.

"Youth have always had that attitude that they are invincible, nothing fatal can happen to them," said Ms. Scott-Jeffroy,

adding teenagers often require more tangible reasons to avoid bad habits such as illicit drug use than vague warnings of future health risks.

"As you develop, the thought process happens so quickly. You go from A to Z without even thinking about it. Young people have to go slowly so they may skip the stuff in the middle and come to the wrong conclusion. Or they may not know they have to go through that process."

For some people, defying authority can be an innocent dalliance. For others, they need the rush of an extreme

sport or engaging in immoral or criminal activity.

Obviously, most people fall somewhere in between.

Is there anyone who doesn't participate in any risky or impulsive behaviour?

"I'd like to meet them. It's not been my experience. There are times when all of us want not to be so grown up," Ms. Scott-Jeffroy said.

"When you talk about stealing, who of us doesn't have an office pen at home? But there is a continuum. Look at the politician who steals a \$60,000 ring"



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