

On the streets

While general road safety education is often highlighted in schools, young people must also be aware of the dangers of joyriding, says [Márianna Csóti](#)

Joyriding is slang for taking a vehicle without the owner's consent. It is not considered theft since the people who take the vehicle do not intend to permanently deprive the owner of the vehicle, just to borrow it. The vehicle might be used for racing another appropriated vehicle, driving at speed for fun and using the car to get away quickly after stealing or mugging someone. Usually, joyriders are young – and they frequently don't hold a driving licence.

In the Government's Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, the importance of young people engaging in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school is stressed. To help address the issue of joyriding, read the following story with the class and then work through the discussion questions, either as a whole class or in small groups. If children have Learning Difficulties, explain what the story is about first. For children with autism spectrum disorders, a more formal approach to the lesson may be preferable to class discussion.

Joyrider

'My Dad says I can have my own car as soon as I pass my test,' Terry boasted.

'I wish I had a Dad who'd give me a car,' Ralph moaned. 'We've barely got a car as it is.'

'What do you mean?' Terry asked. Anything to do with cars interested him.

'There's always something going wrong with it. At the moment, the locks don't work. Mum doesn't think anyone would want to steal it but you can never be sure,' Ralph said, repeating his mother's words.

'Which area do you live in then?' Terry asked.

'Oh, by the repair garage.'

'Yeah, but which street?'

Ralph told him.

'Bit risky, there. What sort of car is it?'

'An Escort. No one would want to nick it, it's too old. The paint's peeling off down one side.'

Two days later, Melanie Cooper got her three-year-old ready and called up the stairs to her son. 'Ralph, it's time to go. If we leave it any later there'll be queues in the shops.'

She picked Rowena up and took her out to put her in the car seat. Melanie stood shocked. The drive was empty. Her legs felt weak and she thought she was going to be sick. Why did bad things keep happening to her?

Melanie went back inside with Rowena and took off her coat. She started to shake. She knew that she had to stay calm because of the children and to cope with a phone call to the police. She'd had to cope with many things since her husband had been killed.

The police promised her car would turn up sooner or later. But without a car Melanie could not claim on the insurance for some time - and not at all if they knew it hadn't been locked. Rowena couldn't walk far without a pushchair and it was in the boot. Useless.

Melanie had to ring her mum for help. She hated having to do it, as she liked to feel independent. She felt very angry with the person who had stolen her car. They had put her in this position.

Ralph thought it strange that he had only been saying the other day that he hoped the car wouldn't be stolen and now it was. It made him feel superstitious.

The following day the police came with some 'good' news. They had found Melanie's car in the local woods. It had been used for racing and had crashed. Probably a right off, so that would speed up the insurance for her, Melanie thought. She arranged to have it towed home.

Melanie sighed in partial relief. At least she could get about now as the pushchair would be back and she could get taxis or ride in Mum's car safely with Rowena in her car seat.

The battered car arrived that afternoon. Melanie felt sad at seeing her means of greater freedom gone. Also, it had been the family car when John was still alive. Another part of that life ended.

Ralph examined the crumpled body of the car closely. It would make a good story at school. Melanie opened the boot. Empty. She opened the front door. No car seat.

How could they have done this to her? She then looked in the front. No CD player. But worst of all, no CDs. She felt torn apart. That was the ultimate violation.

Melanie sat down on the seat and cried. And cried. The last reminder of John's voice had gone forever. The sound of John reading out bedtime stories to Ralph when he was younger was gone. And so was John. Forever.

Author's note: The loss of a deceased's recorded voice is based on an event that actually happened under similar circumstances.

Some steps taken to reduce joyriding

- Police can seize a vehicle if the driver does not produce a valid licence or proof of insurance. They might later dispose of the vehicle by ensuring it is crushed at a scrap yard.
- Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) in cameras on roads is being used to identify stolen cars and cars that have no insurance.
- Number plates that break into pieces when thieves try to steal them are being sold – they can't then be used on stolen cars to avoid being caught through ANPR. (Drivers using stolen plates also frequently drive away from petrol stations without paying.)
- Laws are being brought in to make it more difficult for joyriders to buy cheap, old vehicles from salvage yards.

Discussion questions

1. *Why do you think Melanie's car got stolen?*

Ralph had told Terry about the car not locking – and Terry either stole the car himself (with friends) or told someone else about it.

2. *Name the people that were affected in some way in the story and explain how they were affected.*

Melanie

- She had lost her independence and now had to rely on her mum for help - something she didn't like doing.
- She had lost her daughter's buggy and car seat, so she'd have to buy replacements. The insurance money might pay for it but one doesn't always get enough to replace everything new.

- She'd have to buy another car, but buying one cheap enough with the insurance money might mean it wouldn't be as reliable.
- She'd lose her no-claims bonus. (Unless it was protected by paying extra. But this is doubtful, being financially challenged.) This would make the insurance for her car significantly greater. She might not be able to afford to replace it.
- She'd lost the sound of her husband's voice on CD.

Ralph and Rowena

They'd lost the sound of their father's voice, which would have been precious to them. They were also inconvenienced by not having a car, and Rowena by not having a buggy.

Melanie's mum

She'd been called upon to help out. She might have done this willingly; however, it might not have been convenient for her.

The police

Having to look for a stolen car means they cannot be following up other, more serious, crimes.

The insurers

Paying out on many claims raises the premiums for all.

3. *How would it affect you if your family car (if you have one) was stolen and not replaced for three months?*

(Personal responses required.)

4. *Do you feel that joyriding is acceptable as long as the stolen car is a company car or from someone who can afford the loss?*

(Personal responses required.)

5. *What might happen when people joyride?*

The driver and passengers could get killed or seriously injured and they might kill or seriously injure other

drivers and their passengers, and pedestrians. They could also damage other people's cars and property.

6. *Why do you think people joyride? Think of as many reasons as you can.*

- They haven't passed their driving test because they can't afford to learn to drive, or are too young to learn. Or they might have had their licence taken off them for dangerous driving.
- It is fun and 'cool'.
- They are speeding with other people's cars and so do not have to worry about the expense of repairs.
- They are bored with their lives and want to spice them up.
- They are with a group of friends who do it and they don't have the bottle to say 'no'.

7. *Do you know of joyriders yourself or have you been involved in joyriding? If so, what was your reaction?*

(Personal responses required.)

8. *Do you know the financial effect of someone putting a claim into insurers? What happens to their premiums? Do they get fully reimbursed for the damage or loss?*

- Claimants do not always get reimbursed for the full amount. For example, there is often £50 or £100 excess to pay – so the victim will have to pay the first part of the claim.
- The victim might also lose his or her no claims bonus and will have a higher insurance premium to pay on renewal.
- The victim might not get the full value of the car – its value would be independently assessed (assuming it is a 'write off').

- Insurers charge far more for young and inexperienced drivers because they are more frequently involved in road traffic accidents and are far more likely to take risks more mature drivers would not take. So a young driver who has to make a claim will have to pay an even higher insurance premium on renewal.

9. *If someone is maimed by a joyrider does he or she get compensation?*

Someone who is maimed by joyriders would not be insured, so no compensation would be given. Joyriders don't have insurance themselves and the person whose car it is might not be insured for all drivers – and even if he or she was, joyriders don't drive with the owner's permission so that would invalidate the insurance. And joyriders often don't have a valid driving licence or have even passed their test.

10. *If you knew someone had killed or maimed a child joyriding would you tell the police, think it none of your business or be too scared to go forward? Give reasons.*

(Personal responses required.)

For urgent situations, like witnessing a hit and run crime, young people should ring 999 and ask to speak to the police. When the situation is not urgent they should phone the local police station – or ring Crimestoppers anonymously.

11. *What makes a person a good driver?*

A good driver drives carefully and responsibly, keeping within speed limits and adjusting speed according to road conditions and visibility - without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, including prescription and over-the-counter medication that affect concentration. Any alcohol that's consumed impairs judgement and reaction times – being below the legal limit does not necessarily mean it is safe for
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Convictions

- 'Taking a vehicle without consent' carries a maximum prison sentence of 6 months and/or a maximum fine of £5,000 and discretionary disqualification from driving.
- 'Aggravated vehicle taking without owner's consent' involves the additional offences of driving dangerously on a road or in a public place, or causing injury to another person, damaging property or damaging the vehicle. The offence may be tried at either Magistrates Court or Crown Court. If tried at Crown Court, the offence carries a penalty of a maximum prison sentence of two years or a maximum prison sentence of 14 years if a death was caused, 'owing to the driving of the vehicle'. If tried at Magistrates Court, the offence carries a penalty of a maximum prison sentence of 6 months and/or a fine up to £5,000.
- Drivers convicted of drink driving or driving under the influence of drugs (any recreational and some over-the-counter and prescription drugs) will: lose their licence for at least 12 months, face a maximum fine of £5,000 and face up to six months in prison and pay up to three times as much for car insurance.

someone to drive.

Good drivers take frequent breaks and do not drive when they are very tired. They concentrate on the road ahead and do not get distracted by conversations with passengers. They don't make phone calls while driving and pull in to the side of the road if someone calls them and the conversation interferes with their ability to concentrate. They never hold a phone while driving but use hands-free equipment; nor do they eat, read a map, or fix their hair or make-up while driving. They always wear a seatbelt and ensure their passengers do too.

Statistics

- Young male drivers aged 17-20 are seven times more at risk than all male drivers – but between the hours of 2am and 5am their risk is 17 times higher.
- Young male drivers have higher crash rates than young female drivers – they may do more driving but also they are known to take higher risks.
- Young drivers, particularly males, are less likely to slow on corners or drive under the speed limit in even in icy conditions for fear of losing face with passengers.
- Male drivers under 25 have the highest incidence of failing a breath test after being involved in a road crash in which someone was injured.
- The more passengers young drivers have, the least likely it is for them to wear seatbelts – and the less likely it is for passengers to wear seatbelts. Unbelted rear seat passengers kill about 10 front seat drivers or passengers every year.

It is important for joyriding issues to be addressed before young people become involved themselves, break the law and risk killing or maiming someone – including themselves. The road safety charity, Brake, believes that young males, in particular, should be

educated about the dangers of joy riding from the age of twelve.

Márianna Csóti is the author of, *Contentious Issues: Discussion Stories for Young People* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £18.95). Her website is at: www.mariannacsoti.co.uk

More information

Brake (road safety charity) PO Box 548,
Huddersfield HD1 2XZ
Tel: 01484 559909 Web: www.brake.org.uk
They run volunteer-led community training programmes for young drivers.

Crime Stoppers: Tel: 0800 555 111
Web: www.crimestoppers-uk.org

The Department for Transport (www.databases.dft.gov.uk/secondary) has published a number of lesson plans and worksheets which have been designed to meet curriculum targets and provide teachers with a forum to discuss aspects of road safety. (Look under 'Citizenship Key Stage 4'.)