

BAKWENA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WHEEL WELL ON 'CAR SEATS FOR KIDS' CAMPAIGN

Bakwena Platinum Corridor Concessionaire and Wheel Well, a charity which aims to reduce child fatalities through car accidents, have over the past 2 years collaborated to raise awareness of road safety when children are passengers in a car.

The 'Car Seats for Kids' campaign is aimed at collecting as many used car seats as possible in order to refurbish them and, for a minimal donation they are offered to less fortunate families. Child seats are beyond the means of many families. "A good seat starts at R1200 and the sky is the limit thereafter," says Peggy Mars, founder of Wheel Well.

Charmaine van Wyk, spokesperson for Bakwena, says: "The immediate objective of this campaign is to educate car owners on the hazards transporting unrestrained children, as well as to assist families who cannot afford to buy appropriate car seats."

Mars explains that according to the Road Traffic Act children under the age of three, infants by definition, must be in the appropriate and correctly certified car seat. Children over three and under 14 years or 1.5 m tall must be in a car seat, appropriate and certified, if one is available. If no car seat is available, the child must sit on a seat with a seat belt and if no seat with a seatbelt is available, the child must sit at the back of the vehicle.

With this in mind, there are four types of car seats available, each of which addresses the specific developmental needs of the infant/child at that stage. "Infant seats (Group 0 and 0+) are for babies from birth to nine or 13kg and are always rear facing. Toddler seats (Group 1) are for children from 9kg onwards, or 18kg, and can be rear or forward facing. Full back booster seats (Group 2) are for use by children that have outgrown the toddler seat in length and weight. A child must be at least four years old to use a seat like this. The full back booster seat does not have a harness, so drivers must position the adult seat belt correctly across the smaller body of the child.

"Finally, a booster cushion (Group 3) is a seat used in those final years before a child reaches 1.5m in height. The main function of this seat is to position the lap belt low across the top of the legs and keep it away from the vital organs in the tummy area," says Mars.

She explains that seats are available which combine two or more groups, but cautions parents to be careful when considering a combination seat, as such seats might forfeit vital safety benefits in favour of convenience or economy.

"The protection offered by the seat decreases in every stage, but your child grows in body strength and the skeleton matures to compensate. It is therefore critical to check that the car seat is appropriate for the developmental stage that your child is at and that it is correctly certified," Mars adds.

The safest place to position the child seat is in the middle of the back seat, but a good installation is not always possible there, and the next best option is behind the passenger seat. Mars says the child seat can under no circumstances be placed on front passenger seats due to the airbag, which can kill children.

"Car seats are highly engineered safety equipment designed to keep your child safe during a crash. Do not take it lightly. Do your research, ask the questions and consider your options before you purchase. Further, if your child has outgrown his/her car seat, please donate it to Wheel Well so that we, in turn, can help an underprivileged family to keep their child safe," concludes van Wyk.