

# *Finding a Safe Place to Cross the Road: The Effect of Distractors and the Role of Attention in Children's Identification of Safe and Dangerous Road-Crossing Sites*

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Negotiating traffic requires the ability to focus attention on the traffic environment and ignore distracting stimuli. The aims of this study were (1) to examine the effect of distractors on children's ability to identify safe and dangerous road-crossing sites and (2) to examine the relationship between identification of safe/dangerous sites and attention (selective attention, attention switching, sustained attention and divided attention). Participants were 88 children (aged between 6 and 11 years) and 29 adults. Ability to identify safe and dangerous road-crossing sites was assessed using computer presentations of sites with and without visual and auditory distractions. Measures of attention were examined using the Test of Everyday Attention (child and adult versions). The ability to identify safe and dangerous road-crossing sites and performance on the attention tests were found to improve with increasing age. Correct identification of safe/dangerous road-crossing sites was related to selective attention and divided attention for children but not for adults. Road safety training should take into account the development of these skills. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

*Key words:* pedestrian; child safety; attention development

## INTRODUCTION

'Of all the systems with which people have to deal everyday, road traffic systems are the most complex and the most dangerous' (World Health Organization, 2004, p.1.). Pedestrians are a particularly vulnerable group of road users, especially child pedestrians who have a proportionately higher casualty rate than adult

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