



For Immediate Release

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State and Local Leaders Celebrate Opening of Safe Play Park

New space aims to instill safe road habits for children and families

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: State, regional, and community partners today announced the opening of Safe Play Park, a space for children and families to build lifelong habits around safe driving, riding, walking, and rolling.

WHY IT MATTERS: Traffic crashes remain the leading unintentional cause of death and serious injury for young people. In 2023, 210 people were killed on Sacramento County roads and nearly 796 were seriously injured. Among the crash victims, nearly 17% were 20 and younger.

SACRAMENTO – The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), California Highway Patrol (CHP), Impact Teen Drivers (ITD), and Fulton El Camino Recreation & Park District gathered at Howe Community Park to announce the grand opening of Safe Play Park, a new space for children and families to build lifelong habits around safe driving, riding, walking, and rolling.

Located in the Arden Arcade area of Sacramento County, Safe Play Park transforms safety education into hands-on learning through a miniature street scene—complete with signs and road features children will see in their community. The project was developed by ITD in collaboration with the CHP and brings safety education to life by allowing young people to learn and practice safe road behaviors in a safe environment.

The park reflects a larger statewide effort to change the culture around risky and reckless driving through early, evidence-based education. Practicing these skills in a safe community space helps build habits that extend beyond the park and into everyday actions.

“Impact Teen Drivers is thrilled to open the very first Safe Play Park in California,” ITD Executive Director Dr. Kelly Browning said. “Safe Play Park represents our shared commitment to empowering families with the knowledge and skills to keep children safe. By investing in early, hands-on safety education, we are investing in a healthier, safer future for every child in our community.”



Honoring the Legacy of Dwight “Spike” Helmick

The inspiration for Safe Play Park comes from Dwight “Spike” Helmick, a former CHP Commissioner and longtime ITD board member, who believed in educating youth early through mentorship and a positive, engaging learning environment.

“This park truly honors the legacy of Commissioner Helmick, who led with compassion and dedicated his career to protecting and educating California’s communities, motorists, and pedestrians,” said CHP Commissioner Sean Duryee. “By blending education, enforcement, and direct engagement, this unique space will teach young people about safety behind the wheel, because no age is too young to begin learning and reinforcing safe driving habits.”

“With our partners, the OTS works to build a culture of safety through learning safe practices from an early age,” OTS Director Stephanie Dougherty said. “By reinforcing and practicing safe road behaviors, children and families build strong driving, walking and biking habits into their daily routine.”

“Safe Play Park and other accessible recreational opportunities throughout the state help enhance our continued mission to promote a culture of safety,” Caltrans Director Dina El-Tawansy said. “It is essential to provide consistent education for our young people about the benefits of safe behaviors while driving, biking or traveling as a pedestrian. Encouraging movement and imaginations to flourish in an interactive environment can provide practical, hands-on skills that change behaviors and create a safer future for everyone.”

“Safe Play Park shows what meaningful collaboration at the local, regional and state level can accomplish,” Sacramento County Supervisor Rich Desmond said. “Safe Play Park is an investment in our youth, their families, and this community, and is a testament to our shared commitment to public safety.”

“The Fulton-El Camino Recreation & Park District is proud to dedicate this space for families across the region,” Fulton El Camino Recreation & Park District General Manager Emily Ballus said. “Safe Play Park reflects our commitment to creating inclusive, educational, and fun spaces. We are honored to host a place that will positively impact the community.”

The event brought together several community partners like UC Davis Health, the California Department of Public Health and Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office, offering safety activities and demonstrations throughout the park. This included bike and helmet fittings, teen driver education resources, child passenger safety demonstrations on the proper use and installation of child safety seats, and a drive-through car seat check; a study by the National



Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimated a 46% combined rate of misuse for car seats and booster seats.

The CHP also held “seat belt challenges” with youth, a fun competition that comes with a serious safety message; in 2023, nearly 20% of people killed in crashes on California roads were unbelted. The challenge involves four-person teams seated inside a patrol car with their seat belts buckled. Youth then jump out and buckle up in the next seat as fast as they can.

From bicycle and pedestrian safety to the importance of seat belt use and teen driver education, the community event and park opening provided families with practical tools that help reduce crash risks, especially during the summer months when more people are on the road.

Building a Strong Road Safety Culture

The OTS, Caltrans, ITD, CHP and its partners encourage the public to follow these important safety tips so that we may all get to and from places safely:

Watch for People

- Slow down and follow the speed limit, especially around schools, parks and in neighborhoods where children are present.
- Watch for bike riders and people walking before making a turn or opening a car door near streets or bike paths.
- Be patient when traveling behind a bike rider and give them space when passing. California law requires drivers to change a lane, when possible, to pass bicyclists and always pass with at least 3 feet of space.
- Never drive distracted or impaired.
- Buckle up. Every trip, every time.

Choose the Right Car Seat

- [California law](#) requires all children under 2 years old to ride in a rear-facing car seat, unless the child is 40 or more pounds or is 40 or more inches tall.
- All children under the age of 8 are required to be secured in a car seat or booster seat.
- Children 8 and older, or who are at least 4 feet 9 inches tall, may be secured by a booster seat, but at a minimum must be wearing a properly fitted seat belt.
- Use the “[Five-Step Test](#)” to determine if their child is big enough to safely use a seat belt: Does the child’s back touch the seatback? Do the child’s knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat? Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm? Is the lap belt touching the tops of the legs? Can the child sit like this for the whole trip?



2-2-2 Helmet Rule

- Always wear a properly fitted helmet when riding a bike, scooter or skateboard. Helmets significantly reduce the chance of a head injury in the event of a crash.
- Follow the 2-2-2 rule - **two** fingers between eyebrows and helmet, **two** straps forming a "Y" or "V" under the ear, and **two** fingers under the chin strap to ensure it is snug.

Safe Biking and Walking

- Be predictable. Use crosswalks when available, or cross at corners.
- Be aware of approaching vehicles and practice due care.
- Be visible. Make it easier for drivers to see you – wear light colors, reflective material and carry a flashlight.
- Be extra careful crossing at night when it is harder to see or when crossing busier streets with more lanes and higher speed limits.
- Use bike lights at night.
- Bicyclists must travel in the same direction of traffic and have the same requirements as any slow-moving vehicle.

“100 Safest Days of Summer”

The opening of Safe Play Park comes ahead of Memorial Day Weekend and the “100 Safest Days of Summer,” a national effort that encourages teenagers to adopt safe road habits between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

When school is out, more young drivers are on the road, and historical trends show a rise in serious injuries and fatalities involving teens over the summer. This makes prevention, education and learning safe road behaviors at a space like Safe Play Park essential.

To learn more about the initiative and to take the summer safety pledge, visit 100safestdaysofsummer.org.

For more traffic safety resources, visit www.gosafelyca.org.

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