

THE BUCKLE-UP PROMISE CARD: A VERSATILE INTERVENTION FOR LARGE-SCALE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

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Behavior analysts have developed and evaluated a variety of effective interventions for increasing the use of vehicle safety belts, including participative education programs, buckle-up reminder techniques, and various group and individual incentive/reward procedures (e.g., see reviews by Geller, 1988, 1990; Thyer & Geller, 1990). Many of these behavior-change procedures have been applied on communitywide levels by governmental agencies and grass roots groups (e.g., Bigelow, 1982; Transportation Research Board, 1989). The buckle-up promise card has been a useful component in many large-scale programs that increased safety belt use. This versatile behavior change technique is simple and straightforward, being somewhat analogous to the "say-do" paradigm used with preschool and developmentally disabled children (Karlson & Rusch, 1982; Rogers-Warren & Baer, 1976). Specifically, individuals are asked to sign a written statement of commitment (say) to use vehicle safety belts (do) for a specified period of time (e.g., 1 or 2 months).

Buckle-up promise cards have been distributed to (a) college students at a large university (Geller, Kalsher, Rudd, & Lehman, 1989), (b) medical personnel and staff at a community hospital (Nimmer & Geller, 1988), (c) the military personnel on the largest U.S. naval base (Kalsher, Geller, Clarke, & Lehman, 1989), and (d) company employees attending a lecture or group discussion on the value of using vehicle safety belts (Cope, Grossnickle, & Geller, 1986; Geller & Bigelow, 1984; Kello, Gell-


er, Rice, & Bryant, 1988). In every case, a significant number of promise-card signers increased their use of safety belts following their commitment behavior. In fact, a systematic comparison of six corporate safety belt programs using education and buckle-up promise cards with 13 using an incentive/reward approach revealed similar short-term effects of the education/commitment and incentive/reward programs but greater long-term effects of the programs using promise cards instead of rewards (Geller, Rudd, Kalsher, Streff, & Lehman, 1987). Similarly, Richard Katzev and his colleagues have demonstrated short-term and long-term benefits of this commitment approach when applied to increase participation in community recycling programs (Katzev & Pardini, 1987-1988; Pardini & Katzev, 1983-1984). In a recent comparison of a coupon reward and a promise-card commitment program, Wang and Katzev (1990) found equivalent and beneficial short-term effects of these interventions but showed significantly greater long-term impact with the commitment approach.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate a versatile version of the buckle-up promise card that is applicable for large-scale safety belt promotion and is readily adaptable for motivating the occurrence of other desirable behaviors. The front of the card includes a rationale for the target behavior, a space for the intervention agent (e.g., trainer, manager, or therapist) to sign, and a space for the subject (e.g., student, employee, or client) to acknowledge his or her personal commitment to emit the requested response. The dotted lines show perforations where the card can be separated into three parts. The

Samples of various buckle-up promise cards are available from the first author, Department of Psychology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0436.

IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME. . .

. . .that's what some people say. It is true that the chance of an individual being involved in a serious accident on a single trip is very low. **BUT** over a lifetime of driving, you have a *fifty percent chance* of experiencing an injury-producing accident.



Traffic accidents are the **NUMBER ONE** killer of young people (ages 2 to 44). Every year in this country more than 34,000 people are killed and 500,000 are injured in traffic accidents, amounting to annual financial liabilities exceeding \$60 billion. More than half these deaths and injuries could be prevented *if safety belts were used consistently*.

**MAKE A
BUCKLE UP PROMISE**

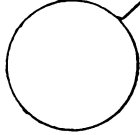
One out of every 60 children born today will die in a highway crash. Three out of four highway fatalities occur within 25 miles of home. Thus, it is critical to develop the *habit of buckling up* on **EVERY** trip. So for your own sake, your family, and me, please make a buckle up promise. . .

Sincerely,

_____ . . .**IT COULD BE A LIFESAVER**

Tear off this card and hang it on your interior rearview mirror as a reminder of your promise to buckle up.

BUCKLE-UP PROMISE



I promise to use my safety belt every time I drive or ride in a car for the next month. I will encourage others to do the same.

Signed _____




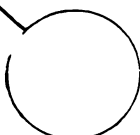
Figure 1. Front of the buckle-up promise card.

lower right buckle-up promise portion of the card was designed to hang from a vehicle's interior rearview mirror as a reminder of one's buckle-up commitment and as a visual prompt for the target behavior. (The circle is a hole in the card with a slit cut to the top right corner; this facilitates hanging the card on the bracket of the interior rearview mirror.)

The back of the promise card includes a postcard and instructions for obtaining additional cards. This is an attempt to get the subject to participate as an intervention agent. Note that the postcard is a useful means of obtaining verbal report data and should be preaddressed to whomever is willing to provide additional cards. We have honored over 3,000 requests for our promise cards since introducing this intervention at traffic safety conferences in 1987. We have adapted promise cards for young children (including commitment spaces for both the child and his or her parent to sign) and for distribution in churches (containing relevant Bible verses and praying hands).

Michael Kalsher and his students at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) have modified the promise card to encourage both using a safety belt and driving sober. The safety belt portion of the RPI promise card was designed to hang from the inside rearview mirror of one's vehicle (as shown in Figure 1), whereas the drive-sober portion of the RPI card was designed to fit into one's wallet or pocketbook to increase the potential availability of this prompt when making a decision to drive after drinking. This portion of the promise card contains a blood-alcohol concentration nomogram, allowing the drinker to estimate his or her level of alcohol impairment from knowledge of body weight and number of drinks consumed per hour. Another variation of the promise card was effective at increasing significantly the use of personal protective equipment (i.e., safety glasses, gloves, and ear plugs) in an industrial setting (Streff & Geller, 1987). The detachable portion of these lattermost promise cards was designed for displaying at the employees' work sites as a reminder of their commitment.

This *personal commitment strategy* is based on the simple idea that safety belt use is ultimately a personal choice. Family and friends can be a source of support regarding matters of personal importance. A personal invitation to buckle up is an expression of care and concern. Furthermore, one's commitment to use a safety belt can be strengthened by asking others to join the buckle up habit. YOU can continue this personal approach by returning the postcard below to obtain more copies. Then simply sign your name on the front and ask *someone you care about* to make a buckle up promise too.



/

BUCKLE UP

Name _____

Address _____

• I kept my promise for ___ days, now I want to pass it on. Please send me ___ copies of the complete Buckle Up Card.

• I got this Buckle Up Card from:

a member of my immediate family

a relative

a friend

other _____

• I told ___ persons about my own promise to use a safety belt.

• I displayed the reminder card in my car:

Yes, How long? _____

No

• On my last ten trips, I buckled up ___ times. Before my promise, I buckled up ___ times out of 10 trips.

PUT
STAMP
HERE

TO:

Figure 2. Back of the buckle-up promise card.

We recommend this simple behavior change technique to the *JABA* readership not only because systematic research has shown it to be effective and socially valid (e.g., Geller, 1989; Geller et al., 1989; Kello et al., 1988), but also because it has large-scale applicability. For example, the Tennessee Traffic Safety Coalition has distributed over 50,000 buckle-up promise cards through its regular newsletter and follow-up requests from business and community groups (C. Parnell, personal communication, April 2, 1990); 10,000 buckle-up promise cards were distributed to high school students throughout Vermont with remarkable media attention (E. Tellstone, personal communication, May 1, 1990); and the Norristown Area School District in Norristown, Pennsylvania has received 364 requests for additional promise cards from school district employees after an initial kickoff and distribution of 700 promise cards (J. Y. Stoudt, personal communication, December 13, 1989).

We hope the feasibility of using a promise card to increase the occurrence of other desirable be-

haviors is obvious and that we will eventually learn of other successful applications.

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