

Athena's Adventures in Health Policy

Better Buckle Your Belt



FOR AGES
6-8

By Ana Rita Gonzalez and Margarita Quijano

Illustrated by Melina Sugliano and Rodrigo Palacios

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“Is everyone ready to leave?” Mama Owl called. She was wearing a floppy yellow sunhat and carrying a bag of towels. Athena hopped up and down in excitement. It was beach day, and she was ready to splash and play in the ocean.



Her brother Odin pointed to their baby sister and said,
“Rae still needs her hat.”
“I’ll get it!” said Athena. Carefully, she put the little green hat
on Rae’s head, and then Papa Owl led everyone to the car.



“NO!” shouted Rae when Mama Owl tried to buckle her car seat.

Rae did not enjoy road trips.

“Shhh,” said Mama Owl. “It’s not a long drive.”

Athena frowned. An hour felt like a long drive. “Mama, I don’t want to buckle up either,” she decided.

“And I’m too big for this booster seat,” said Odin, squirming.



Mama and Papa Owl sighed.

"We will never get to the beach if no one buckles up!"



After a few minutes, Athena said, “SHHH!”
Then, once Rae and Odin were quiet, she looked to her parents and asked,
“Why are car seats and seatbelts so important?”
“That’s an excellent question, Athena,” said Papa Owl.
Mama Owl smiled. “See how your booster seat helps your seatbelt fit
properly? Without it, your seatbelt would slide off.”
“And seatbelts must be worn by everyone,” added Papa Owl,
“not just children.”



“Who makes health policies?” asked Odin. Now, he was listening instead of squirming in his seat.
“Our leaders in government,” Mama Owl answered. “They use science to create policies that help us feel our best.”



“But why?” asked Athena.
“It’s a health policy,” said Papa Owl.
“It’s like an instruction from a parent or teacher, and it helps us stay safe.”



“But how do seatbelts help us?”
Athena wanted to know.
“The government found that they hold us safely in our seats, even during a car accident,” said Papa Owl.
He sounded very serious.

“Oh,” said Athena, pulling on her seatbelt. “That does seem important.”
“Maybe we should buckle up,” said Odin. “And Rae, too.”



Together, Athena and Odin buckled Rae into her car seat.
“We have to keep you safe during the trip,” Athena explained.
Rae smiled at her and squealed, “Beach, beach!”
Athena and Odin returned to their booster seats, put on their own seatbelts,
and waited for Papa Owl to start the car. It was finally time to leave!



It was the perfect beach day.
Athena and Odin splashed in the waves, collected seashells,
and built a sandcastle for Rae to knock down.



They ate a picnic lunch and watched the sunset over the waves.
And at the end of the day, they all put on their seatbelts and went home.

One week later, Athena took another trip, this time to her grandparents' house.

"Would you like to run some errands with me, Athena?" asked Grandpa Owl.

"Oh, yes," she replied.



Athena loved running errands, and Grandpa Owl had a whole list. He was going to the grocery store, the post office, and the library.

Athena put her booster seat in the back of Grandpa Owl's car and buckled her seatbelt.

As Grandpa Owl pulled out of the driveway, Athena said, “Wait, Grandpa! You’re not wearing your seatbelt.” He smiled at her in the rearview mirror. “That’s all right, honey. It’s just a short drive to the grocery store.”



Athena shook her head, smiling back at him. “Do you know about seatbelt policies, Grandpa? Mama and Papa taught me and Odin about them last weekend.” Grandpa Owl stopped the car. “Is that so? What did they tell you?”

“Seatbelts are for everyone,”
said Athena, “not just children.
It’s a health policy that keeps us safe.”
Grandpa Owl chuckled.
“Don’t worry, honey. There won’t
be any accidents between my
house and the grocery store.”



Athena sat quietly for a moment, thinking.
Then, she said, “I love you, Grandpa, and
I don’t want to see you hurt. Would you put
your seatbelt on... just in case?”

Grandpa Owl smiled. “You are very wise, my dear Athena,” he said.

“I will wear my seatbelt—today and in the future.”

His seatbelt made a *click* sound, and Athena sighed in relief.

“Thank you, Grandpa,” she said.



The next day, Athena sprang out of bed, ate breakfast, and waited impatiently for Mama Owl to take her to school. It was a field trip day, and Athena's class was going to the planetarium. "We'll learn all about outer space," she said as she hopped into the car and put on her seatbelt. "Odin told me there's a whole movie about Mars!"



"Don't forget that Hui's mom is driving you to the planetarium," said Mama Owl. "You'll need to bring your booster seat with you." Athena nodded. "Don't worry, Mama. I promise to be safe."

At school, Athena and her classmates lined up behind their chaperones and marched out to their cars. Athena was riding to the planetarium with her friends Hui, Conroy, and Zosia, and they whispered to each other as they walked.



“Do you think we’ll see any astronauts?” asked Conroy.



Athena put her booster seat in Hui’s family car and grinned. Her friends were just as excited as she was to learn about outer space.



“I heard that the movie screen makes you feel like you’re in the night sky!” said Zosia.



But once everyone was in the car, the worst happened. “Mama,” said Hui, “do I have to wear my seatbelt? It’s scratchy.”



“Can I leave my booster seat at school?” Conroy asked. “I bet my parents would be okay with it.”

“It’s just a short drive,” Zosia added.



“Hold on,” said Athena, looking around at her friends.
“Do you know why we use booster seats and seatbelts?”
Hui, Conroy, and Zosia all shook their heads.
Athena took a deep breath.

Then, she turned to Conroy and said, “Booster seats help our seatbelts fit tightly. That’s why we must use them, even on field trips.”



Next, she turned to Hui and Zosia. “Seatbelts keep us safe during accidents, which can happen even on short drives.”

Conroy wasn't convinced. "Who makes these rules?" he asked.

"Our leaders in government," Athena replied.

"They use science to create health policies, which are like instructions from a parent or teacher."

"Oh," said Conroy. "It sounds like this is a pretty important policy."



Hui's mom, who was sitting in the driver's seat, nodded.

"It's very important, Conroy. And the sooner you all buckle up, the sooner we can go to the planetarium!"

Athena, Conroy, Zosia, and Hui all buckled their seatbelts.

When they arrived at the planetarium, Athena and her friends sprang from the car to meet their other classmates. “Did you wear your seatbelt?” Conroy asked one of his friends.



“My dad wouldn’t let me leave without it,” his friend complained. “When I’m grown up, I’ll drive everywhere without a seatbelt.”

“But wearing your seatbelt is a health policy,” said Conroy. “Come on—I’ll teach you about it while we walk inside.”



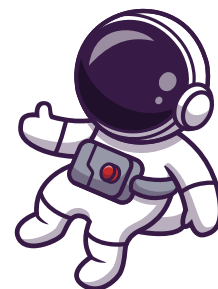
Athena looked around the parking lot.

Hui and Zosia were telling their friends about seatbelt policies, too! I'm so glad Mama and Papa taught me about this, Athena thought to herself. The doors to the planetarium opened, and she hurried to catch up with her group. "Do you think astronauts wear seatbelts, too?" asked Hui, and together, they walked inside to find out.



You can practice health policy just like Athena. Always wear your seatbelt, and remind your loved ones to wear theirs, too!

THE END



Writing this series of storybooks is a dream come true and is more rewarding than I ever could have imagined. I want kids of all ages to know that working in health policy is as viable as becoming a doctor, an architect, a teacher, or a farmer.

Thank you so much to my teammates for helping me conceptualize and write each book; to our amazing editor, Aquinnah Bree; and to our talented illustrators, Melina Sugliano and Rodrigo Palacios. In creating this series, we have also created a lifelong bond.

- Ana Rita Gonzalez, President & CEO, Policy Wisdom LLC

We truly hope you enjoyed reading this edition in the Athena's
Adventures in Health Policy series!

We invite you to encourage the young people in your life
who are interested in public health to learn more about us
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Athena and her siblings are on their way to the beach. Everyone is excited to play in the ocean... but no one wants to wear their seatbelt. With help from their parents, they learn about the policies that keep us safe in the car. But does Athena have the courage to share these policies with her friends?

Through Athena's Adventures in Health Policy, Policy Wisdom aims to inspire the next generation of public health professionals and show them the importance and impact of health policies. Learn more about our mission at policywisdom.com.

