



Don't cut the cord

THEY'RE a tough audience. Anyone who has ever fronted a room full of teenagers knows that they often bring with them a take-no-prisoners approach.

Over the past eight years I've learnt that if you want teenagers to listen to you then you'd better be laugh-out-loud funny or have a powerful, personal message that shocks the hell out of them.

And when it comes to the latter, I don't think anyone is doing it better than SEAT, the Spinal Education Awareness Team presenters.

This month for our First Sunday Club I'm nominating the Spinal Injuries Association. More specifically I'm nominating their free SEAT program which sends presenters, all of whom have either quadriplegia or paraplegia, into schools to candidly talk to students about their injuries, how they got them and, most importantly of all, to share crucial safety messages.

As Spinal Injuries Association CEO Mark Henley tells me: "There is no cure for a spinal cord injury. The spinal cord is the width of a pinkie finger and has the consistency of a banana. Once it's damaged it cannot be repaired."

Each year 90 Queenslanders sustain a



spinal cord injury. That's one Queensland every four days who is waking up in hospital trying to come to terms with the fact that they have lost all function and feeling from the neck or chest down. And most likely that Queensland will be a male aged 15-30 – young men with that inherent Superman mentality.

The messages the SEAT presenters hammer home are nothing new. It's stuff parents mutter every weekend to their kids. The dangers of jumping into shallow water without checking the depth first. Why you need to wear a seatbelt in a car

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or a helmet on a bike or skateboard. The stupidity of drink-driving or texting and driving. And how the wrong tackle on a footy field can irrevocably change your life the way it did to a guy I know called Dave, who became a quadriplegic as a teenager following a school footy game.

He's married now and is a phenomenal artist. But Dave has a fulltime carer who helps bathe him. That's the reality.

You and I can say this stuff to our kids but the truth is it usually takes someone else to say it – to act as a living, breathing warning – for the message to hit home.

So this month I'm asking you to give \$10 to the Spinal Injuries Association to help them fund their free school visits and maybe even buy a set of multimedia equipment for all 16 volunteer presenters.

(Each set of equipment would include a laptop, speakers, projector and accessible carry case that would allow them to show up to any school prepared without having to rely on schools having working projectors.)

So donate your 10 bucks at www.spinal.com.au. And if you'd like a free SEAT presentation at your school, call 3391 2044.

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