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DRIVER, 14, CHARGED IN HIT-AND-RUN

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GIRL, 7, RECOVERING
FROM CAR-BIKE CRASH

As a 7-year-old girl struggled to walk and talk again Thursday, a 14-year-old boy was charged with driving the car that put her in a coma almost four weeks ago.

The teenager, whose name was not released, was charged with leaving the scene of an accident with serious injuries, a felony carrying a penalty of up to five years in prison, the Florida Highway Patrol said.

The teenager also was charged with two misdemeanors, reckless driving and driving without a license, troopers said.

"We're going to plead not guilty," said Manuel **Casabielle**, a Coral Gables attorney who is representing the teenager. He arranged for the youth to turn himself in voluntarily at the FHP station in Davie.

"This is a completely new experience for my client and for the family," **Casabielle** said. "This kind of experience can be devastating."

While attorneys debated whether the teenager should spend the night at the Broward County Juvenile Detention Center, the Estrella family rejoiced that Massiel Yolanda, 7, had recognized them, even smiled.

A car speeding at 60 miles per hour hit Massiel as she was riding her bicycle Sept. 10 in front of her home in the Lake Forest development near Hollywood, troopers said.

The car traveled about 75 feet on Southwest 47th Avenue before the young girl was bounced off the hood, trooper James Rubio said.

After emerging from a coma about three weeks ago, Massiel had only groaned in pain and mumbled her 9-year-old sister's name -- until Tuesday night.

"I was leaving her room when she asked me, 'Don't leave. I don't want to be alone,'" said Juana Estrella, Massiel's mother. "It was a miracle."

Juana and Jose Estrella, Massiel's parents, are more concerned with their daughter's recovery than with the status of legal proceedings.

"I'm not going to worry about all that," Juana said. "I'm only going to worry about my daughter getting better."

A judge was expected to decide today whether the 14-year-old boy will be detained until his trial date, which also may be set today, juvenile justice officials said.

The youth was released to the custody of his parents Thursday after troopers took him to the detention center in Fort Lauderdale, **Casabielle** said.

Three teenagers have given police statements saying they were in the blue Honda Prelude at the time of the accident. They identified the 14-year-old boy as the driver, Rubio said.