HELPING CHILDREN LEARN PEDESTRIAN SAFETY SKILLS:
Overview for parents and caregivers

Walking is a fun and healthy way to spend time with your child. You are your child's most important role model for walking safely. Children learn by watching others, so your own safe pedestrian behavior is the best way to teach these valuable skills. Consider these tips as you walk with your child:

1. Obey all traffic signs and signals.
2. Choose routes that provide space to walk and have the least amount of traffic and lowest speeds.
3. Look for traffic at all driveways and intersections.
4. If possible, cross at a crosswalk or at an intersection with a walk signal.
5. Stop at the curb and look for traffic in all directions (left, right, left, to the front and behind). At an intersection, it is important to look in front and in back to check for turning vehicles. The second look to the left is to re-check for traffic that is closest to you.
6. Wait until no traffic is coming and start crossing; keep looking for traffic as you cross the road.
7. Walk across the road. Do not run.
8. Wear reflective gear if it is dark or conditions limit visibility, such as rain or snow.
9. Talk with your child about what you're doing and why as you walk.

Although you might be able to see quickly that it is safe to cross the road or make other decisions while walking, your child may not know or understand why it is safe. Help your child understand and learn safe walking skills by practicing them each time you walk near or around traffic and taking the time to talk through new situations.

As a driver you can also be a role model for safe behavior. Respect pedestrians and use the drive time to teach your child about signs, signals and other traffic rules.

Developing pedestrian skills

Children's ability to understand and make decisions about where to walk and cross the street change as they grow and develop.

Children age four to six:

1. Have limited judgment, making it hard for them to know where or when it is safe to cross the road.
2. Cannot gauge the speed of oncoming traffic.
3. Can be impulsive and lose concentration easily.
4. Have a hard time staying focused on one task, such as crossing the road.

Walk together

This age group needs to walk with adults who will make safety a priority. Children age four to six still are learning what it means to be safe. They should always be with an adult while walking. The best way for children to learn is by repeating safe walking skills with an adult.

Prepared by the National Center for Safe Routes to School with funding from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Overview for parents and caregivers (continued)

Children age seven to nine:

1. Need supervision as they learn more complicated pedestrian safety skills.
2. Can begin to identify safe crossing sites with help and practice.
3. Can begin to learn how to identify traffic and stay focused while crossing the street with help and practice.

Teach lifelong skills

These years are the time to teach skills that prepare children to be safe walkers throughout their lives. Children age seven to nine can begin to learn more complicated pedestrian safety tasks. Even though they are older, they always should be with an adult while walking near or around traffic. The best way for children to learn is by repeating safe pedestrian skills with an adult.

Children age ten and older:

1. Need specific instruction and modeling as they learn more complicated pedestrian safety skills.
2. Can identify safe crossing sites with help and practice.
3. With help and practice, can identify traffic and stay focused while crossing the street.

Find a mix of independence and supervision

Children age ten and older gradually can learn more complicated pedestrian safety tasks. Even though they are older, they should still be with an adult while walking near or around traffic until they consistently demonstrate safe pedestrian skills. The best way for children to learn is by practicing safe pedestrian skills with an adult. As children grow, revisit these safety issues often to make sure they are still practicing safe behavior.

How can you help?

You can help your children by talking with them and showing them the correct safe behavior. Consider starting with these tips:

1. Walk with your child to model correct safety behaviors.
2. For routes that will be repeated (like walking to school), walk with your child to help pick the safest route. Explain that is important to always follow this route.
3. Stop at every curb and talk with your child about the importance of stopping to look for traffic in all directions before crossing.
4. Wait with your child at the curb and explain that it is important to wait until there is no traffic coming in any direction before crossing the road together. If you are at an intersection with a walk signal, explain that you wait until the walk sign appears and then look in all directions for traffic before crossing.
5. As you cross, help your child stay focused on crossing safely by holding his or her hand and walking directly to the other side of the street.

How to choose the safest route

1. Choose the route with the fewest streets to cross.
2. Avoid crossing busy or high-speed streets.
3. Pick places that have sidewalks when possible. If there are no sidewalks, the second choice is to walk facing oncoming traffic as far to the left as possible.

Make sure to always follow this same route when walking with your child to a particular destination.

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HELPING CHILDREN LEARN PEDESTRIAN SAFETY SKILLS:
For parents and caregivers of children age four to six

You know your child's behavior and abilities best. Keep in mind that all children develop differently but young children always need supervision when they walk in or near traffic. Help your child become a safe pedestrian by practicing these skills.

Help your child safely cross the street

1. Stop at the edge of the road.

   Say: We stop here at the edge of the road to look for cars before we cross.

   We only cross where we can see if cars are coming.

2. Look in all directions for traffic.

   Say: Before we cross, we look for cars. We look left, right, left again and behind us. Let's look together.

3. Cross only when no cars are coming.

   Ask: Do you see any cars coming?

4. Hold hands when crossing. Walk across the road when no cars are coming.

   Say: Now we can walk across the road because no cars are coming. We're going to keep watching for cars as we cross.

Help your child understand the traffic environment

1. Walk with your child and hold hands.

   Say: We always hold hands when we walk to stay safe.

2. Explain stop signs, crosswalks, traffic lights and other pedestrian signs that you see along your walk.

   Say: Stop signs are red, they tell cars to stop. Crosswalks are where people walk across the road. Traffic lights tell cars when to stop and when to go. For cars, red means stop and green means go.

3. Show your child the safest place to cross.

   Say: This is where we cross the road because we can see when cars are coming and they can see us. We cross at a crosswalk or intersection when we can because that is where drivers expect to see walkers.

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