



Pedestrian Safety

Parents & Caregivers – WALKING & TALKING

WALK with your children and **TALK** with your child about pedestrian safety. Your presence and your guidance can help reduce the risk of injury!

START with your toddler and gradually teach them about safety, beginning with simple information. Many young children are fascinated by cars and trucks. A two year old riding in a stroller can understand that cars belong on the road and people belong on the sidewalk! A three or four year old can be taught that she must always hold your hand when crossing the street, can help you look both ways to watch for cars and can learn that it is not safe to run out into the road, even after a favourite toy.

BUILD on earlier conversations with information appropriate to your child's level of understanding. Discussions can come naturally, as there are many opportunities and circumstances that invite a brief comment or teaching moment.

- When weather conditions change (e.g. snow, fog, rain)
- When a ball goes over the fence and onto the road
- When witnessing jaywalking or other unsafe pedestrian practices
- When taking, or deciding on, a new route to school or the playground
- When visiting a new place
- When moving to a new neighbourhood
- When it's a child's first time walking with friends
- When a child is preparing to walk alone for the first time

TALK about what you do before you cross a road. Teach your child to use their eyes AND their ears. THINK, LOOK AND LISTEN. Always. Even if there is a crossing guard, or traffic signals to assist them.

TEACH them to stop at the curb, look left, right and left again, and to listen for oncoming traffic. When the way is clear, or all the cars at the crosswalk or intersection have come to a full stop, teach children to cross the road, and not to double back or run. Children should be cautioned not to cross between parked cars, or in the middle of a street, but at a corner. In addition, they should treat driveways and alleyways as "mini roads" and watch for moving cars. If there are no sidewalks, children should walk in a single file, away from the road, facing traffic. After awhile, all these behaviours will become second nature to your child.

WHEN NOT TO WALK AND TALK: If your child has a cell phone, make it a rule that they do not use it while they are walking, and not while crossing streets. Distractions put children at a much higher risk of being struck by a vehicle. Even walking with a group of children can distract a child from crossing safely, so tell your child to keep this in mind. It's great to have friends to walk with – but don't forget the safety rules!

BE A ROLE MODEL by walking with your child and talking with your child about safe pedestrian practices. Over time your frequent demonstrations will become ingrained in their approach to crossing roads. But remember, if you jaywalk or run across a street against a light with your child, you can expect them to do the same thing when they are crossing the street independently.

ASK others who are responsible for your child's welfare (grandparents, daycare staff) to discuss safe crossing when they accompany your child on outings.

Remember that children need three important skills that are typically **NOT** acquired until between 9 and 11 years of age: Your child should be able to:

1. Decide on *and* use a safe crossing route
2. Realistically assess a vehicle's speed
3. Judge safe gaps in traffic

Supervise children who have not yet reached this stage!

Although many younger children are being driven to school, Canadian communities are taking an interest in active living to promote good health, in addition to supporting the environment by leaving the car in the driveway more often. This may lead to a renewed family enthusiasm for walking to school. It is vital to encourage parents and caregivers to talk to children about pedestrian safety during these walks, and it is equally important to create more walkable communities that promote safe, pedestrian-friendly environments. Increased pedestrian numbers actually heighten driver awareness, which results in slower rates of speed and fewer child pedestrian injuries.