

Safe Kids Canada
Photovoice for Rail Safety



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What is Photovoice?

Photovoice projects happen around the world and involve taking photos in order to highlight local child safety issues. Armed with a camera and knowledge about a particular safety issue, be it pedestrian safety or being safe around railway tracks, children and youth are encouraged to photograph issues of concern to them, with the supervision of adults. Photovoice can also be used to illustrate a participant's new level of awareness and knowledge regarding safe surroundings and behavior.

Why Photovoice?

Photovoice can be used as a tool for community engagement on safety issues for a number of reasons:

- It positively engages children, parents, teachers, leaders and community members in identifying hazards in their community and exploring possible solutions.
- Photographs taken by children can be used as a starting point for greater community awareness and potential advocacy initiatives.
- It empowers children to learn about photography while discovering and understanding the importance of behavioural and environmental issues in relation to safety.

Objectives:

- To educate children and youth about the rules for safety around trains and railway tracks, including the dangers of trespassing.
- To empower children and youth to demonstrate their knowledge and capacities through a creative experience, specifically using photography as a tool to document their perspectives on rail safety.

Necessary materials:

The only necessary equipment is a camera of some sort. This can be a digital or film camera, or a cell phone camera. The instructor leading the pre-sessions may want to use a white board, chalk board or presentation paper to explain basic photography rules, and the safety rules and features that children will be adhering to and looking for on their photographic field trips.

What makes a good picture?

Leaders may choose to present some basic information about photography before going outside to take pictures. This will add value to the Photovoice project by increasing the participant's understanding of photography and enhancing the quality of the photos created. A few pointers that will help with taking a great picture include:

- Choose a **subject** – Choose one thing, a person, place or object, which will be the focus of your picture. A single element, like a person or a building can be a subject, but a good photograph will explore deeper and focus on particular aspects to these larger elements. For example, a building could be an interesting subject, where a focus on the crumbling bricks of a building would lend itself causing those viewing the photograph to react, and therefore could be a more interesting subject. When choosing a subject, ask yourself what the purpose of the photograph is, or what reaction you'd like the viewer to have.
- Find a **context** – A context is the environment or backdrop that adds relevance, contrast and/or location to the subject. You can simplify the context of a photograph by getting closer to the subject, zooming in, or cropping.
- **Subject Placement** – Where the subject is placed in the frame shows its relevance to the context. The centre of the frame is the weakest place, because it is static and dull. The more a subject is moved away from the centre, the more relevance the context will have.
- **Line and Paths** – Impact can be created in photos by using real or inferred lines that lead the viewer's eye into and around the photograph. Roads, sidewalks, posts and fences are "real" lines. Line can add feeling to your photograph; horizontal lines are peaceful, diagonals are dynamic or tense, and curves are energetic and active.

The Ethics of Photography:

Photography projects with children and youth should include a discussion about ethics and the potential risks to participants. Be sure to discuss issues such as respecting community members and personal safety.

Respecting community members

Participants must remember to respect the privacy and rights of members of the community. Leaders in Photovoice should include discussions about ways to protect personal privacy.

Participants should not take pictures of others without their consent, or pictures of people's homes that are easily identifiable.

Personal safety

Leaders can help children to be aware of risks, including physical harm and loss of privacy to participants and subjects. No picture is worth taking if it endangers the photographer or subject! Teach safe strategies to minimize risk.

Rail safety rules:

Under no circumstances should any Photovoice participants go on private railroad property or close to the train tracks in order to take a picture of 'what not to do on the tracks'. Safety should be an utmost priority during this exercise.

Children and youth taking photos may want to consider taking photos that demonstrate safe behaviours. In addition, other images of interest may include different types of rail signage, a passing train (taken while the photographer is standing well back from the closed gates) or the flashing lights on the gate. The photos taken during the Photovoice outings may be used to reinforce safe behaviours, or to advocate for environmental changes. Should young photographers find examples of missing or damaged signage, this would be an opportunity to use the picture to advocate for changes to the community.

10 lessons that every child should know in order to stay safe around railway tracks:

- **Don't take shortcuts.** If you are not crossing at a designated crossing, you are trespassing. This is dangerous and illegal. Walk to a designated crossing.
- **Cross at the right place and time.** The only place to cross at railway tracks is at a designated crossing. Do not try to cross the tracks when the flashing lights have come on and the gate is down.
- **Obey the signals.** Never walk around a closed gate. At designated crossings, flashing light signals and gates activate only 20 seconds before the train reaches the crossing. This is not enough time to cross the track.
- **Make sure the way is clear.** When you cross railway tracks, stop, look and listen before crossing.
- **A train cannot stop as quickly as a car.** A train needs much more time and space to come to a complete stop than a car needs. Unlike a car, a train cannot swerve to avoid a collision.
- **Never try to outrun a train.** Trains are closer and are moving faster than you realize. The average 150-car freight train is traveling 100 km/h.

- **Stand 16 feet or five meters back from the rail.** Objects can fall from trains. Stand at least 16 feet or 5 meters back from the tracks to avoid getting hit by falling objects.
- **Check for a second train.** If one train passes, make sure a second train isn't following behind or approaching on another track. Wait until the first train has passed and then make sure both tracks are clear before crossing.
- **Never ride a bicycle over train tracks.** The wheels can get caught in the track and you could fall off your bicycle. Always walk your bicycle across the tracks when it is safe to cross.
- **Do not trespass.** Railway property is private property. Playing on railway tracks and bridges is dangerous and illegal. It is against the law to trespass on railway property.

Implementing Photovoice:

It is up to you to decide how to best implement Photovoice in your community. Below are suggested sessions; however each of these does not need to be covered separately. You may want to combine a few sessions together depending on your timelines. The following elements can be included in the implementation of your Photovoice project:

Introduction to Photovoice:

The introductory session is an opportunity to launch Photovoice, and explain objectives and processes. This time can also be used to look at examples of other photographs and have a discussion about what makes a good picture, or a discussion about photography can be broken out into a separate session.

Introduction to photography:

Talk about the basic principles of photography; choosing a subject and context, subject placement and lines and paths in a photo. Examples of different photos, such as close ups, portraits and action shots can be used to illustrate the discussion. To make this session participatory, ask participants to bring in an example of a photo they are drawn to, either from a magazine, newspaper, the internet or a personal photograph. They can discuss how the photos are composed and what makes them interesting. This session is also a time to discuss the ethics of photography.

Discussion about rail safety:

Children should participate in a guided discussion which introduces and reinforces rules that everyone needs to follow to be safe around trains and railway tracks (see Rail Safety Rules section). Explore participants' views about rail safety – they may have first hand experiences to share, or stories about others. Resources such as the Safe Kids Canada website and printed materials may be helpful. As an option, during this session, the group could create a walking map of the safe routes to follow during the observational field trip. Another optional activity for this session is to use the rail safety scenarios included in this manual (see Appendix A), as the basis for discussion or creative presentations. Appendix B, a rail safety checklist, provides you with some elements to check for to ensure a crossing is safe.

Observational Field Trip:

An observational field trip is an important part of the Photovoice experience, however participants should be monitored to ensure that they are not engaging in unsafe behaviors while observing trains and railways tracks and taking photographs. Ideally, there should be a group of four or five children for every adult supervisor. Another option with this session is to have two observational field trips. The preliminary outing could involve a walkabout to choose possible photo locations while discussing safe behaviour and a subsequent trip to take the photos.

Debrief and Slideshow:

This is an opportunity to discuss the experiences of the observational field trip, including what participants saw and felt, and to reinforce safe behaviours when close to trains and railway tracks. A slideshow can be organized to view all the pictures taken during the observational field trip. Some guiding questions for the discussion could include asking the participants why they chose to take certain pictures, to describe the environment seen in the photo, and based on the photo, why it is important to be safe.

After Implementation:

Safe Kids Canada would welcome any photos and stories about your experience that you would like to share. With your permission, we may feature these on our website and in our partner newsletter to let others know about your good work.

You may want to select some of photos to create a poster or display to let others know about your experience and what was learned about rail safety and being safe around railway tracks. These

materials can be displayed at local schools, community centres, libraries or other common community spaces.

If during your observational field trip and subsequent discussions, you identify an area of concern, we encourage you to contact the CN police. They can be reached at 1-800-465-9239. If the rail property is not CN owned, the owner information and contacts will be posted onsite. Please contact the owner of the crossing as appropriate.

APPENDIX A

Scenarios for discussion in Photovoice

“What Would You Do?”

This activity encourages children and youth to creatively address real-life situations, while recognizing the conflicting emotions that dangerous situations can present. The primary goal is to generate open discussion. Arriving at a satisfactory solution may be challenging, but an answer that includes going on the tracks must be ultimately addressed as unsafe and unacceptable.

Divide the children into four groups, and assign each group with a different situation, either as handouts, or written on flipchart paper with space to write or illustrate their thoughts underneath. Children will read their group’s scenario and discuss how they might react and explore safe options. They can record their reactions and possible solutions with words or pictures or even act out their solution as a short play.

Hypothetical Situations:

- A. Jason is walking home from school. He looks down the street just as his neighbour’s dog squeezes through a fence and onto the railway tracks. Jason knows this dog really well, and has even looked after it when his neighbours go on holiday. He is upset to see the dog on the railway tracks! What would you do in Jason’s situation?
- B. Melissa and her friends are late for school and someone suggests that they take the short cut across the tracks. Taking the short cut will mean the difference between arriving before the bell, or having to report to the office to get a late slip. As the group approaches the short cut Melissa starts to feel really uncomfortable, as she has been taught that to cross the tracks is extremely dangerous AND against the law. What would you do if you were her?
- C. Sam is being hired by his uncle, to deliver weekly flyers for a family business and he is happy to have a chance to make a little money. Sam’s cousin Wayne, a grade 12 student, is showing Sam the route and giving him tips. Sam is surprised to learn that part of the route includes using a dirt path that leads right across the neighbourhood railway tracks, which Wayne has been using for years to reach houses that the business wants to access. Wayne explains this is the best way to deliver the flyers efficiently; otherwise it takes twice as long to go several blocks to the pedestrian crossing. Sam hesitates as they reach the gap in the chain link fencing. What would you do in Sam’s situation?
- D. Diane, a grade six student, has been a member of her school’s “green club” for years. This year’s parent volunteer, Mr. Mitchell needs an extra set of hands, as he heads to the garden centre a couple of blocks away, with two wagons to pick up soil and mulch. Diane is happy to help. As

they are returning to school with their loaded wagons, they approach the neighbourhood level railway crossing just as the bell sounds and the gate drops. Mr. Mitchell gestures to Diane to hurry up so they can beat the train. As he jogs forward, pulling his wagon behind him, he shouts back to Diane that they have plenty of time to beat the train and there's no way he wants to wait for it to pass! Diane feels heavy in the pit of her stomach as she nervously watches Mr. Mitchell start to navigate around the gate. She glances at the train...it doesn't look that close. What would you do in Diane's situation?

APPENDIX B

Checklist for Rail Safety

Observe the area around the neighbourhood train tracks and at the railway crossing and look for the following:

- ✓ Are there gaps in fences or graffiti that indicates trespassing?
- ✓ Is there a dirt path (monkey trail) that people have been using?
- ✓ Have people been observed behaving unsafely? If so, in what way?

At a rail crossing:

- ✓ Does signage indicate that there is a rail crossing?
Is there a demarcated area to cross the tracks? When a train is approaching:
- ✓ Are there barriers and do they work? Do lights flash and does a signal sound?
- ✓ Do pedestrians, cyclists and drivers behave safely when a train is approaching?
- ✓ How far back are people standing while the train passes by?
- ✓ Note any safe or unsafe behaviors.