

Pedestrian Safety Parents & Caregivers – WALKING & TALKING

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

START when they are toddlers and teach them about safety, starting 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! Three- or four-year-olds can be taught that they must always hold your hand when crossing the street and they can help you look both ways to watch for cars. They can learn it is not safe to run out into the road, even after a favourite toy.

BUILD on earlier talks with information your child can understand. There are many chances for a brief chat or teaching moment:

- When the weather changes (e.g., snow, fog, rain)
- When a ball goes over the fence and onto the road
- When seeing 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 help 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 turn back or run. Children should be told not to cross between parked cars, or in the middle of a street, but at a corner.

Also, 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 a while, all these behaviours will become second nature to your child.

WHEN NOT TO WALK AND TALK: If your child has a cellphone, make it a rule that they do not use it while they are walking, and especially not while crossing the road. Distractions put children at a much higher risk of being hit 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 what you show your children will become ingrained in how they cross 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 on their own.

ASK others who take care of your children (grandparents, daycare staff) to discuss safe crossing when they accompany your children on outings.

Remember that before children are crossing streets on their own, they need three important skills most children do not have until between ages nine and 11. Your child should be able to:

1. Decide on and use a safe crossing route
2. Tell how fast a car is going
3. Decide when there is a big enough gap in traffic to safely cross

Although many younger children are driven to school, Canadian communities are starting to encourage walking to promote active living and help the environment by leaving the car home more often. This may lead to more family interest in walking to school.

Parents and caregivers should talk to children about pedestrian safety during these walks. It is also important to create more walkable communities that promote safe, pedestrian-friendly environments. Larger numbers of pedestrians can lead to more driver awareness, slower speeds and fewer child pedestrian injuries.