

Safe Walking

Keeping Young Pedestrians Safe and Fit



Why children under age 10 are in danger from cars

Research shows:

- Children pay attention to only one thing at a time. When playing, they may forget about traffic.
- They often act without thinking.
- Children do not understand the danger of a moving car. They cannot judge the speed of a vehicle coming toward them.
- When they see a car, they think that the driver sees them and can stop for them.
- They cannot judge where a sound is coming from.
- Because children are small, it is harder for drivers to see them.

Children can learn the steps of safe street crossing. However, they may not do what drivers expect when playing or in a confusing traffic situation.

See the back for tips on child safety for specific ages

Walking is good for everyone's health

Walking in a safe area is one of the best ways for children and adults to stay healthy. It also allows older children to become independent. Parents can teach young children safe walking skills while they walk together.

Did you know?

- Many parents think young children can cross streets safely long before they are ready. Know your child's ability. Experts say many children are able to make good judgments in traffic at about age 9 or 10.
- Most often children are hit by vehicles near their homes in the afternoon. Some are hit at bus stops by cars passing their school bus illegally.
- Speed kills. A person hit by a car going 20 mph has a 5 percent chance of dying. At 40 mph, the chance of dying increases to 85 percent.

Steps you can take:

Find safe play areas away from streets, driveways, or parking areas.

Children need space for active outdoor play, but they are in danger near traffic.

Make sure an adult or trusted teenager watches children under age 10 carefully around traffic. Do not expect children under age 12 or 13 to care for younger ones near streets.

Say "no" when your child begs to walk places without an adult if she is not ready to do so. Find safer things she can do to feel independent.

Know how much you can trust your older children (age 10 or over). You must decide when they are ready to walk to places without an adult.

Teach your children to walk safely. Set a good example. Show him how to cross streets safely (see page 2). Make sure he learns to stay on sidewalks. On streets where there are no sidewalks, make sure he walks facing traffic.

Find the safest walking routes to school, park, library, and friends' homes. (Use the Walkability Checklist—see Resources, page 2.)

Make children easy to see. They should wear fluorescent (bright) colors in the day and clothes with reflectors in the dark.

Slow down when you are driving. Be careful on local streets or near schools and playgrounds. Always stop for school buses with flashing red lights. Work with neighbors to slow traffic on local streets.



Hold hands with a child in a street or parking lot.



Toddlers (1 to 3 years)

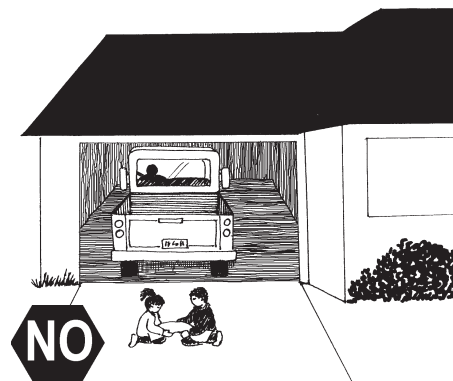
Dangers: Being hit by a starting vehicle while playing in a driveway. Wandering into the street while walking or playing.

■ What can parents do?

Walk all the way around your vehicle before you get into it. Be sure that there are no children behind or in front of it.

Find fenced places where children can play safely. Keep them away from streets, driveways, or alleys. Always watch them closely.

Always hold hands with your child while walking, crossing, in parking lots.



Toddlers playing in the driveway are in danger from a backing vehicle!

Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)

Dangers: Running suddenly into the road, alley, or parking lot while playing.

■ What can parents do?

Find safe areas where children can play, like a park or schoolyard. Keep close watch on your children while they play!

Hold hands while walking and crossing. Show them how to watch for cars.

Early elementary children (6 to 9 years)

Dangers: Dashing into the street while playing or walking with friends.

Crossing streets without help from an adult or older child. Walking to and from school, especially alone or along busy streets.

■ What can parents do?

Practice safe street crossing together and set a good example. Walk facing traffic where there are no sidewalks.

If your child walks to school, make sure she goes with an adult or older child (4th grade and older). Check to make sure your child obeys the older child. Teach your child to do what the crossing guards say.

If your child takes a school bus, make sure an adult is at the school bus stop with him. A child could be hit by his own bus or a passing vehicle. Make sure children stay away from the street while waiting.

In the afternoon, an adult should meet the bus. If children must cross the street after leaving the bus, they must follow the bus driver's directions. They should cross in front of the bus. Tell them to watch for cars passing the bus.



How to Cross Streets Safely*

Practice these steps with your child whenever you cross together.

* Children under age 10 should always cross with an adult or responsible older child.

1. Stop at the edge of the street.
2. If you are near a corner with traffic signals, go to the corner to cross.
3. Cross in a place where you can see up and down the street. This means that drivers can see you, too.
4. Look left-right-left to make sure no traffic is coming. If at a corner, look all ways. Watch for turning vehicles.
5. If a driver seems to be slowing down, look into his eyes. Make sure he sees you and stops before you cross.
6. Walk—don't run—across when no traffic is coming. Keep looking left and right as you go.

Older elementary children (10 to 12 years)

Dangers: Thinking they will not get hurt. Being confused by traffic on busy streets. Walking in the dark in early morning and late afternoon.

■ What can parents do?

Help your child learn to judge where and when to cross safely. Make sure they know how to follow traffic signals. At corners, teach them to look over their shoulders for turning vehicles.

Make sure children wear clothes with reflectors so they can be seen at night.

Resources

Walk to School Day: www.walktoschool-usa.org

National Center for Safe Routes to School:
Walkability Checklist, www.saferoutesinfo.org

Safe Kids Worldwide: www.usa.safekids.org
(search for pedestrian safety)

Keep Kids Alive—Drive 25 Campaign:
402-334-1391, www.keepkidsalive.com

Risk Watch: school curriculum for safety, www.riskwatch.org, 617-984-7285