

TRAFFIC SAFETY: SCHOOL ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

School safety begins before children arrive at school, and it doesn't end until they arrive safely back home.

From fall to spring, millions of children are on the streets every day making their way to and from school. They walk, bike, ride the bus, or are driven by parents. When hundreds of children converge on one building, or sometimes a complex of buildings, the traffic can be a nightmare and the risks to kids can be numerous.

When children are present they must contend with distracted drivers and parents ignoring school traffic rules that may include:

- By-passing school drop off and pickup zones
- Dropping off children on the wrong side of the road
- Letting children jaywalk
- Getting in the way of buses arriving and departing
- Double parking or inappropriate parking wherever there is a space
- Not being patient

Things can become even more chaotic during bad weather.

Ideally, every school would have one loading zone for buses and another for cars. Bike racks would be located in an area that allows safe and easy access. The parking lot would be designed to allow cars to enter without crossing paths with students who walk or bike. In reality, many schools are cramped for space and are located in high-traffic areas. Separating all these vehicles and children can be a real challenge.

Adding to the potential danger many teens drive to school or ride along with a sibling or peer who drives. This is by far the riskiest way to get to school. Teen drivers, in particular, cause a disproportionately large number of accidents each year accounting for 55% of school travel-related deaths and 51% of injuries, according to figures from the National Research Council.

Therefore, many parents opt to drive their children to school. Taking the time to be a safe driver is all the more important when children are in the vehicle, especially during the morning and afternoon rush hours, when traffic is often at its heaviest around a school site.

One fact adds some urgency to the need for safety to and from school. About 815 students die annually and 152,250 are injured during regular travel between school and home.

Kids are going to fall, crash, slip, and tumble. It's all part of being a kid. But there are little things we can do to ensure that kids avoid more serious injuries that can lead to disabilities and death.

TRAVELING BY CAR

- Be clear with your child about your policies for safe driving, make sure you model those policies yourself.
- When backing out of driveways watch for children on the sidewalks.
- Be alert. Children may dart into the street without looking – **SLOW DOWN**.
- Keep distractions (loud music, cell phones, conversation, food and drink) to a minimum.
- Insist on seatbelt use at all times -- **NO EXCEPTIONS**.
- Consider creating a written agreement with your teen about the rules of safe driving and be clear and firm about enforcing it.

TRAVELING BY FOOT – For children who live close enough to walk

- Consider whether the age of your child is compatible with walking safely to school
 - Is the child old enough to be alert to the dangers of traffic
 - Is the child old enough to not get distracted or delayed
- Walk the route first – is it free of hazards – with no dangerous crossings
- Consider available day light
- Wear brightly colored clothing
- Have a backup plan for bad weather
- Walk with other neighborhood children

TRAVELING BY BIKE

- Consider the age of your child to follow basic traffic rules
 - stop and look both ways before entering the street
 - stop at all intersections
 - use hand signals
- Always wear a helmet
- Wear brightly colored clothes
- Consider available day light
- Avoid heavy traffic routes

RESOURCE TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/on-the-go-/Pages/Safety-On-The-Way-To-School.aspx>)
- Family Education – Getting To School Safely (<http://life.familyeducation.com/safety/school-bus-safety/48169.htm/>)
- National Crime Prevention Council: What Parents Can Do to Keep Kids Safe at School (<http://www.ncpc.org/topics/school-safety/copy-of-school-safety/>)
- Safe Kids Worldwide (<http://www.safekids.org/safetytips>)
- When Kids Walk to School Alone - Care.com (<http://www.care.com/a/when-can-kids-walk-to-school-alone-1306280259>)