

Safe Walking

Keeping Young Pedestrians Safe and Fit

Child
Safety
Facts
2026



Why cars are a danger to kids, especially under age 10

Research shows:

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

Children *can* learn the steps for safely crossing the street. But they need lots of practice time, with supervision. Even children who know how to cross safely can get confused in traffic.

See the other side 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. Walking also allows older children to become independent. Parents can teach young children safe walking skills while they walk together.

Did you know?

- Experts say children are not able to make good decisions in traffic until at least age 10. Many parents think young children can cross streets safely long before they are ready.
- When children are hit by cars, it is most often near their homes and 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.

Be a good teacher and role model when walking

Teach children to walk safely. Show them how to cross streets safely (see page 2). Tell them to use sidewalks. On streets where there are no sidewalks, teach children to walk facing oncoming traffic and as far from cars as possible.

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

Know when it is safe for your older children to walk alone (age 10 or over). You must decide when they are truly ready to walk to places without an adult.

Find the safest walking routes to school, the park, the library, and friends' homes. (See National Center for Safe Routes to School under *Resources*, page 2.)

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 carefully watches children under age 10 around traffic. Do not expect children under age 12 or 13 to care for younger children near streets.

Set a good example by following safety rules. Use crosswalks, when available.



Hold a child's hand when near streets or in parking lots.

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

**Make
Every Ride
A Safe Ride**



Toddlers (1 to 3 years old)

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

■ What can parents do?

Be sure no children are behind or in front of your car. Walk all the way around it before you get in. Use a rear-view camera, whenever possible.

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

Hold your child or hold hands while walking, crossing, and in parking lots.



Toddlers playing in the driveway are in danger from a car backing up!

Preschoolers (3 to 5 years old)

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 children how to watch for cars.

Early elementary school children (6 to 9 years old)

Dangers: Dashing into the street while playing or walking. 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?

Realize that your child may seem to know how to cross but is still too young to do so without help.

Keep practicing crossing the street together.

Use sidewalks. If there are no sidewalks, walk on the side of the street facing oncoming traffic.

If your child walks to school, they should always be with a trusted adult or older child (7th grader or older). Check to make sure your child obeys them. Teach your child to do what the crossing guards say and to use crosswalks.



Teach children to look left, right—and then left again—before crossing the street.

Be extra careful at bus stops. Children can be hit by their own bus or a passing car. Ensure there is always an adult present to supervise children at a bus stop, both in the morning and afternoon. If children must cross the street, they must follow the bus driver's directions. They should cross in *front* of the bus when they are told to go. Teach them how to watch for cars passing the bus.

Older elementary school children (10 to 12 years old)

Dangers: Thinking they will not get hurt. Being confused on busy streets. Walking in the dark or while using cell phones or wearing headphones.

■ What can parents do?

Help your children learn to judge where and when to cross safely. Make sure they know about traffic signals. At corners, teach them to look over their shoulders for turning cars. Remind them to stay aware of surroundings.

Make sure children wear clothes with reflectors when it is dim, like evening and early morning or in bad weather. Walkers are hard to see when it's dark.

How to Cross Streets Safely*

Talk to your child about these habits while you practice crossing:

- Use crosswalks and/or traffic signals whenever possible. Make it a rule.
- Avoid crossing near parked cars. If you must cross near one, be sure it is not running before stepping into the street.
- Cross where you can see up and down the street (not on a curve or where things block your view). This means drivers can see you better, too.
- At a safe place, follow these steps:
 1. Stop fully at the edge of the street.
 2. Look left-right-left to make sure no traffic is coming. If at a corner, look *all* ways and watch for turning cars.
 3. If a driver seems to be slowing down, look at his eyes. Make sure he sees you and stops before you cross.
 4. Walk—don't run—straight across when no traffic is coming. Keep looking left and right as you go.

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

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics: www.healthychildren.org (search "pedestrian")

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

National Highway Traffic Safety Admin.: www.NHTSA.gov (search "pedestrian")

Safe Kids Worldwide: www.safekids.org/walking

Walk to School Day: www.walkbiketoschool.org