



Walking to school for the first time

If your child is walking to school for the first time this year, take a few moments to think about how you will prepare your child to stay safe along the way.



Hold your child's hand

As you leave your house you are very likely to be near a road even if it is a quiet road. Always hold your child's hand and if there is no footpath and you have to walk along the road edge, have your child walk on the side which is away from the traffic. You just never know when your child might stumble or do something unpredictable that could put them in front of an oncoming vehicle.

Choose the safest route possible

Choose a route with footpaths (if you can) and one that crosses very few (if any) busy streets.

Walk the route with your child

Before school starts, walk the route together and talk about things your child needs to remember along the way such as staying on the footpath. If there is no footpath, walk along the edge of the road as far away from traffic as possible, and facing oncoming traffic.

Identify safety houses along the way

Point out the homes that have 'safety house' plaques on their letter boxes or homes of family or friends where your child might stop for help in case of trouble.

Teach your child the basic rules about being a pedestrian while you're walking with them

You can practise the rules about the road and traffic with your child during your walks, so that much of this understanding feels like second nature to your child. Make it fun by playing games with the road signs such as I spy and praise them when they get it right. In this way, by the time your child is old enough to walk to school without your help, none of the pedestrian road rules should come as a surprise to them.

Always stop, look, listen and think before stepping onto the road

Each time you cross the road make sure your child stops back from the kerb. Tell your child to look in all directions and listen for vehicles that they cannot see. However, be sure to tell your child not to rely on their hearing as the only form of knowing whether or not vehicles are about as many newer vehicles can be extremely quiet. Train them to use both their eyes and their hearing together when checking for traffic.

Ask your child questions about what they'd do in certain situations when you're walking

For example, you come to a crossing. Ask your child what they should do now. You should expect your child to answer something like: "I stop, look in all ways to check the cars are actually stopping before I cross and only when I am sure they've stopped can I go across". Keep reminding your child of the right approach until they're able to say it back to you in their own words (this shows they've understood it properly).

Explain to your child why paying attention to certain things when walking is important

This doesn't just mean the obvious hazards like speeding cars but also less evident ones such as cars coming around corners suddenly or vehicles not stopping at pedestrian crossings. Explaining the reasons for staying alert while walking helps children to understand more clearly why something is expected of them, especially if they know the consequences of not paying adequate attention or of not practising basic safety precautions.