ROSPA

accidents don't have to happen

Teaching Road Safety: A Guide for Parents



THINK! Road Safety

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Introduction

Road safety is a great subject in which to engage children and young people. It's a subject even the youngest children know something about because everyone uses the roads, whether driving, walking, or travelling as a passenger. Unfortunately, this comes at a price, which includes people being killed and injured. However, road deaths and injuries are not inevitable. The last few decades have demonstrated that effective and comprehensive road safety strategies can reduce the number of people killed or injured on the road, despite increasing traffic.

Walking and cycling to school are an important part of the government's active travel agenda and help build daily exercise into our lives, resulting in health and environmental benefits. Parents and carers play an important role in preparing children to become independent travellers. This guide provides advice on what age specific road safety information children should be taught and simple techniques for doing this.

A survey commissioned by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) of parents of primary school children found that less than half had received any road safety education training within the last 12 months in school, meaning that in many cases, road safety education becomes the responsibility of parents. For those children who did receive some road safety education it is still vital that parents build on this, reinforce the learning and set a good example. Encouragingly, the survey also revealed that more than half of parents felt that they were best placed to teach their child road safety skills.

Road safety is best taught in a practical setting meaning that parents are ideally placed when walking their children to school to discuss road safety topics such as safe and dangerous places to cross the road. Children often mimic the behaviour of their parents and carers, so it is vital to be consistent and put into practice safe crossing techniques.

The guide focuses primarily on teaching these skills to children aged between 4 and 11, although there is some advice for younger and older children.



Toddlers

When your child first starts to walk with you, talk to them about how they must always hold hands with a grown-up that they know, walking on the side of the pavement furthest away from traffic. You should make sure that hand-holding is the number one rule that your child always follows when walking near the road. If your child is likely to pull away from you, it may be advisable to use safety reigns or a wrist strap.

At this age, you will need to speak simply about road safety in a way that your child can understand. If you use words such as kerb, remember to explain what that is. Even at a very early age, you can explain how zebra and pedestrian crossings work. You can make pressing the button and waiting for the green man into a game.

Talk about bright and dull colours and which are best seen at night. You could also show your child clothing with reflective strips and how the material shines at night when a light is shone on it.

Key messages

- Difference between footpath and the road
- How to walk with a grown-up who they know and hold hands near the road
- Introduce Stop, Look, Listen and Think
- Introduce safer crossing places
- Be bright be seen

The Department for Transport has resources that you can use:

https://www.think.gov.uk/education-resources/



Children aged 5-7 (Key Stage 1)

Children are never too young to start learning about how to cross the road safely, how they should walk on the pavement and how to behave safely near the road and around traffic. They are more likely to learn when out on the road, rather than in a classroom or through talking about road safety at home.

Bear in mind that younger children might not understand that different situations require different responses and behaviours. For example, if you do not stop at the kerb when crossing the road to search for traffic because it is clearly an empty road and continue directly into the road, your child may not understand that they need to actually look before stopping for the traffic.

At this age, children should always be accompanied by and hold hands with an adult they know around roads, particularly when they are crossing the road. Although the onus is on the motorist to look out for pedestrians, it can be difficult for motorists to see smaller children, particularly when reversing, so take extra care. Never let your child go near a road alone, even with an older child. If your hands are full, you can ask your child to hold onto your shopping bag or a pushchair handle.

Children at this age cannot accurately judge the speed of traffic and safe gaps in traffic in the way that adults can and should not be left unsupervised to cross even quiet roads alone.

Key messages

- How pedestrians walk safely on the pavement and vehicles use the road
- How to walk with an adult who they know and hold hands when walking near the road
- Safer crossing places and how to use them
- The **Stop, Look, Listen and THINK** sequence.
- How pedestrians walk on the pavement and vehicles travel on the road
- Places where it is not safe to cross the road,

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Driveway safety

A key area of concern regarding children's road safety is surprisingly at the child's own home. RoSPA is aware that, since 2001, at least 39 children have been killed on or near their home driveway. 25 of these deaths were caused by a reversing vehicle, and some were caused when the handbrake was accidentally released. Despite these statistics, RoSPA has found that 68% of parents believe it is unlikely that their child would ever be injured by a vehicle entering or leaving the driveway.

There is reduced visibility of children when reversing off a drive, so it is best to reverse onto the drive when parking, so you can drive off forward when you leave. Also, make sure to check that children have not followed you outside of the house without you realising, and monitor children who may be excited to greet a visitor whilst their car is still manoeuvring.

It is vital to teach children about the dangers of driveways, both at home, and when out walking.

Crossing the road

You may think that crossing the road is easy, but for a child it is much more difficult. This is because crossing the road involves many tasks- identifying a safe place to cross the road whilst considering parked cars, junctions and kerbs, paying attention to traffic, looking and listening and focussing on the need to walk rather than run across the road. Therefore, it is a good idea to take your child out near a quiet road to begin to practice crossing the road safely.

The Stop, Look, Listen and Think sequence

Children aged 5-6 can begin to learn the Stop, Look, Listen and Think sequence.

Stop: when you approach a crossing, STOP before you come to the edge of the pavement
Look: LOOK for cars, bikes, lorries and other vehicles by looking right, left and right again
Listen: LISTEN for vehicles too. You may be able to hear them before you see them
Think: is there enough time for you to cross the road safely?



Remind your child that if they are wearing a hood, they will need to remove this when crossing the road as it could restrict their ability to see and hear traffic approaching.

Although it is very important to teach children about the roads that they use almost daily, such as in the local area and travelling to school, it is important to teach them about the different types of roads that they may not encounter so often, such as those on holiday or on a day trip. Your child will need to learn the differences between for example the local roads and a very busy road in front of a beach, or in a busy city centre and rural roads with lots of hidden bends and no pavements. If you are travelling abroad, you can show and explain to your child that in some countries, vehicles travel on the other side of the road.

Road signs and crossings

At this age, you can start to talk about road signs and crossings. When you are walking with your child, you can talk about and point out:

- **Traffic lights**, and what the different signals mean
- **Yellow or white zig zag road markings**: explain to your child that cars and other vehicles are not allowed to park anywhere on these lines. They are used to allow young people to see clearly right and left when they are crossing the road. They may see these markings on the road near their school.
- **Speed limit signs**, such as the 20mph sign: explain that these signs tell drivers to reduce their speed to 20mph or less because there is likely to be pedestrians on the pavement and crossing the road. The lower speed helps drivers and pedestrians to be more aware of one another. This is a good opportunity to mention that circular signs give motorists an order.
- **Children crossing sign**: explain to your child that this sign indicates to drivers that they should be watching for children waiting to cross the road in the area.



Be safe, be seen

It is also important to teach children of all ages about the need to be visible on the roads, and this is particularly important as the evenings get darker at the end of autumn and throughout winter. You will need to encourage your child to wear clothes that make them visible to motorists. Many coats and school bags have reflective strips to make your child more visible to motorists. It is vital that your child understands the need to see and be seen, and how difficult it can be for motorists to see them. You can explain to them how their clothing can affect their visibility to other road users and how it can affect their ability to see and hear what is going on around them. Explain the difference between reflective and fluorescent materials. Reflective materials show up in the dark and fluorescent materials allow you to be seen in daylight.

Road safety education apps

Although practical experience of using the roads is vital and is the best way for children to learn, you can also draw on the use of educational resources. For example, Virtual Road World, a mobile phone app, has been developed by University of Cardiff with funding from Road Safety Trust. The app, which is free to download and play, immerses users in a virtual environment where they need to complete a series of quests requiring them to cross roads as they find their way around a virtual city. By playing the game, children learn how to safely navigate roads, traffic and crossing points. It offers a fun and accessible way to help children choose safe road crossing sites in the real world. This app is particularly suitable for children between the ages of 6 and 8.

Please note that resources such as this have not been designed to replace practical training delivered by parents and in some cases, schools.



Children aged 7-11 (Key Stage 2)

When your child reaches the age of eight or nine, you may be starting to consider whether to allow them to walk independently. It can be a tough decision, as you will need to consider their development and weigh up the benefits of them being active with the traffic danger they may face in your area. You will also need to begin preparing your child for the transition to high school as they become an independent traveller.

However, it is important to bear in mind that as children develop at different rates, some children will not be ready to cross the road independently at the age of eight. As a parent, walk with and speak to your child to get an idea of their knowledge and understanding of road safety. Remember that children can be impulsive and forget for a moment the dangers of traffic if they are distracted.

How do I know my child is ready to travel independently?

Children are ready to go outside and navigate roads alone only when they are aware of the key pedestrian road safety rules, understand them fully and can put them into practice.

Your child must also be able to demonstrate that they can accurately judge traffic and interpret how far away it is and how fast it could be moving, so that they know how long they have to cross the road safely.

Initially, always walk with your child to make sure that they are aware of and can put into practice the Green Cross Code.

Key road safety messages

- The Green Cross Code and how to put it into practice, recognising safe crossing places on the road
- Road signs and pedestrian crossings
- The Highway Code and the rules of the road

Practice the Green Cross Code when crossing roads

The Green Cross Code is an important aid in learning to cross roads safely. If children learn this and always follow the code when they cross the road, it will help them to be safer. Explain to them that it is important to stop at the kerb, look both ways and listen out for traffic before crossing the road. When it's safe to cross, remind your child to walk straight across the road and keep looking and listening for traffic. Do not cross diagonally.

The Green Cross Code

Children aged 7 can begin to learn the Green Cross Code and how to put it into practice.

1) **Find a safe place to cross**
   - **Use a pedestrian crossing if there is one**
   - **Choose a place where you can see clearly in all directions**
   - **If an obstacle is blocking your view of the road, choose a better place to cross!**

2) **Stop just before you get to the kerb**
   - **Do not stand on the kerb**
   - **If there is no pavement, stand at the edge of the road.**

3) **Look all around for traffic and listen**
   - **Traffic can come from any direction**
   - **Sometimes you can hear traffic before you see it**
   - **If you see or hear an emergency vehicle in the distance, let it pass.**

4) **If traffic is coming, let it pass**
   - **Never run across the road when traffic is coming, even if you think there is time. It can be difficult to judge the speed of traffic**
   - **Be aware that traffic may speed up.**

5) **When it is safe, go straight across the road- do not run**
   - **Continue to look and listen as you cross**
   - **Look out for cyclists and quieter vehicles, you may not hear them approaching**
   - **Walk straight across the road.**

Choosing safer places to cross the road, including pedestrian crossings

Always set a good example to your child by choosing a safe place to cross the road and explain what you are doing.

Knowing where it is safe to cross the road can be a difficult task for children as they may have divided or selective attention. It has been found that the ability of a child to choose a safe place to cross increases in age, likely because the child becomes more able to concentrate on the situation effectively.

Where possible, use pedestrian crossings such as Zebras, traffic light crossings (Puffin, Pelican or Toucan), subways or footbridges. You can let your child help you to decide when and where it is safe to cross the road. If there are no crossings, explain to your child that they should choose a place where they can see clearly in all directions, and where drivers can see them, with pavements on both sides.

Remind your child that they must wait for the green man before crossing a Puffin or Pelican crossing and to make sure that all traffic has stopped before crossing at a Zebra crossing. They should also be aware that if there is an island in the middle of the road, they should treat it as two separate crossings. When using a safe crossing place such as a pedestrian crossing, it is important to remind your child that they should keep looking and listening while they are crossing, in case a driver has not seen them. They should also watch for motorcyclists and cyclists.

Explain to your child that it is not safe to cross when they cannot see far along the road and that they must not cross until there is a safe gap in the traffic and there is plenty of time to get across, reminding them that even if the traffic is a long way off, it may be approaching very quickly. They should also look out for buses and never cross the road in front of a bus, because it may be concealing oncoming traffic. The bus may start moving; and the child won't be able to see vehicles on the road coming towards them because the bus blocks their view; they are also hidden by the bus, so drivers cannot see them. Remind them to wait for the bus to leave so they have a clear view of the road from both directions and they can also be seen by other road users.

Check driveways for moving vehicles

Many children walking or on bikes are hurt by vehicles pulling out of driveways. Therefore, it is important to look out for and encourage your child to be aware of hidden entrances and driveways as they walk along the pavement. There are a number of tips that it is advisable for your child to be aware of and follow:

- Check vehicles in drives to make sure they are not about to move out. Watch out for brake and reverse lights, a person sitting in the driver's seat and listen out for engine noise. However, remember that electric cars can be very quiet and difficult to hear
- Moving vehicles in a drive can be hidden by hedges and walls, so take extra care
- If a vehicle is moving, stop and let it pass. You should only carry on if the driver sees you and waves you past.

Parked cars

It is important to explain to your child that they should not try to cross a road between parked cars if possible, because drivers will not be able to see them very well and the cars might begin to move. However, if there is no other place to cross, they should choose a place where there is a big space between the two cars, and there is no sign that either car is about to move (look out for drivers in the car, lights and listen out for the sound of engines).

They should follow the Green Cross Code, by looking and listening from the pavement, and if they cannot hear or see anything coming, step out and stop by the lights of the car, before stopping, looking and listening again. They should only cross if it is safe to do so, and if a vehicle comes down the road they should go back to the pavement quickly and start again. Children should also be reminded to be aware of busy streets and parked vehicles, as drivers are less likely to see them when they are pulling out or reversing.

Visibility

It is important for children to understand the need to see and be seen, and how difficult it is for drivers to see them. Children need to know how their clothing can affect their visibility to other road users and how it affects their ability to see and hear what is going on around them.

Preparing for high school and independent travel

As your child approaches the age of 11, you will need to begin to consider the move to secondary school and their journey to school. For many children, this is the first time that they have travelled any distance from home without you. They may have to use unfamiliar modes of transport, such as buses and trains, on an unfamiliar route.

It is a good idea to have a couple of practice runs before the big day with a parent, carer or friends, so that your child is sure of the route and know how long it will take.

The Department for Transport has teaching resources that you can use:

https://www.think.gov.uk/education-resources/



Young people aged 11-15

Your child's risk of being injured on foot or on a bicycle increases as they gain independence. Far more teens are knocked down and hurt than younger children. Peer pressure can also cause young people to behave in unsafe ways near the road.

This group are at further risk due to longer journeys to and from school with friends or on their own. Ensure that they understand the importance of walking directly to their destination, without stops or diversions.

Even as your child approaches adolescence, you should keep talking about road safety with them, and ensure that they know the importance of continuing to take great care when crossing the road, including putting away their phone and taking out any earphones when crossing the road. Remind them that they will be unable to hear traffic if they are listening to music through their earphones or see it properly if they are wearing a hood.





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