

Is My Child Ready to Walk to School Without Me?

This is a question that crosses the mind of many parents when it comes to active school travel. Remember, all children are unique, so we must consider their individual developmental and maturity level when deciding if it is safe for them to walk to school without an adult. Children usually aren't ready to start walking to school without an adult until about fifth grade, or around age 10.

Younger children are more impulsive and less cautious around traffic, they may not be able to judge the distance and speed of cars, and they often don't fully understand other potential dangers they could come across.



Until your children are ready to walk independently, continue to walk with them to and from school. Familiarize them with the neighborhood, teach them about traffic signs, street signs and directions, and model correct behaviors when crossing streets. It's also a great opportunity for some chat time with your children.

You are your child's best teacher, so keep these tips in mind when walking with your child to and from school:

- Children should walk in groups to make them more visible. If that's not possible, they should walk with at least one sibling or neighbourhood friend.
- When crossing streets, hold your child's hand and always observe the traffic safety laws.
- Observe all traffic signals and let the school crossing guard help you when possible.
- Be sure to look all ways before crossing the street and continue to watch for vehicles. Remind children to make eye contact with drivers as drivers may not always see them.
- When they start walking independently, make sure they stick to a safe route to school.
- If they need to cross any streets on the way to school, practice safe street crossing with them before they do it without you.
- Make sure they know how to say "no" if someone they don't know offers a ride, and that they yell and run for help if needed.

- Explain to them that it is not safe to use a cell phone or text while walking, which makes them less aware of traffic.
- Choose brightly colored backpacks, jackets and other accessories, ideally with reflective materials for days when it begins to get dark earlier.

Sometimes as parents, we need to take baby steps until we feel comfortable with the changes as our children grow up. Transition to this new independence at your child's own pace. Talk about the experience, and address things that didn't work. Once you feel comfortable, your children will be well on their way to developing excellent life-long habits!

