Tip #10

play it safe:
walking and biking safely (toddlers & preschoolers)

Toddlers are often hurt by backing vehicles.

Dangers for young children on the move:

- darting out into traffic from the middle of the block;
- playing in or near the street;
- riding a tricycle or bike in a parking lot, driveway, or street.

Young children are NOT small adults!

1. They move quickly and can run into the street without warning.
2. They don't know safety rules and expect adults to watch out for them.
3. They are small and hard for drivers to see.
4. They cannot judge speed or distance of vehicles moving toward them.

Children hit by cars can be hurt or killed, even when cars are moving slowly. Toddlers (one and two year olds) are most often hurt by a backing vehicle. If a child is playing in a driveway or parking area (**A**), a driver may not see him. Preschoolers (three and four year olds) are most often hit when dashing across a street near home.

Falls from tricycles or other play vehicles can cause serious head and brain injury. These injuries to young children can be as serious as injuries to older children falling from bikes.

B. Hold your child's hand so she doesn't dash into the street.

Take steps to safety

Supervise, supervise, supervise

Parents and caregivers must watch toddlers and preschoolers closely when they are near parked or moving vehicles. To supervise properly, you must be near your child, not watching from a distance. Hold your child's hand when you walk together along the street (**B**).

Find safe places to play

Keep children away from traffic (**C**). Fenced yards, parks, or playgrounds are good places for your child to ride and play.

Are there safe play places for children in your neighborhood? If not, talk with neighbors, local police, and community planners about ways to improve the area. (See Tip 14.)

C. Parks and playgrounds are safe places to play away from traffic.

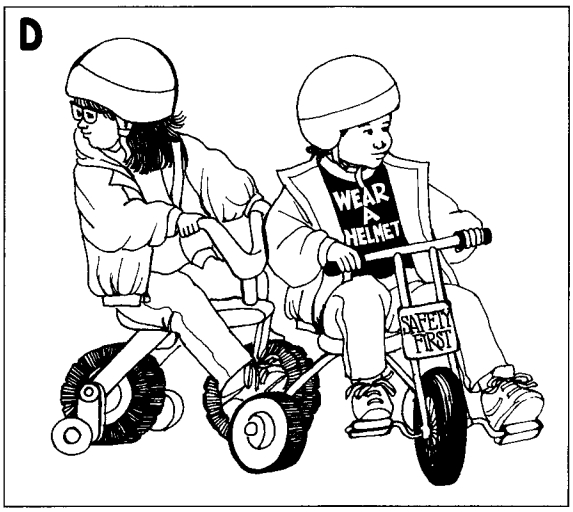
Set a safe example

Young children learn by watching adults. Show them safe ways to cross streets and always wear a helmet when you ride a bike.

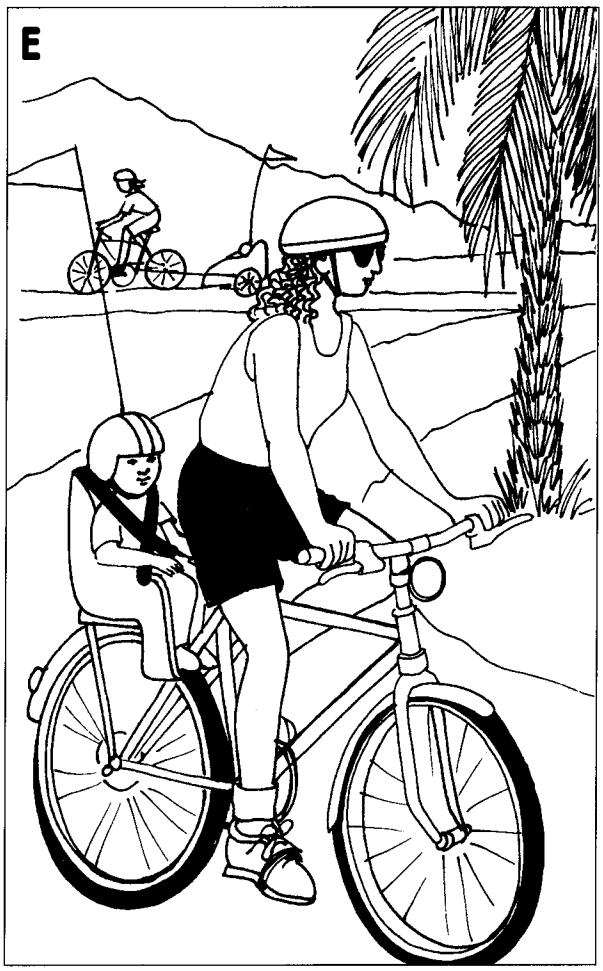
Get them in the habit

When walking, talk to your child about street safety. Show him/her how to stop at the edge of the street and look for cars. Don't expect your young child to do this by herself.

Start children wearing helmets with their first tricycles or play vehicles. When children begin helmet use early, they are more likely to keep the habit in later years.



Start helmet use early - even when riding a tricycle or play vehicle.



Only children over age one have the neck strength to wear helmets and ride on the back of bikes.

Head out safely

Wearing a bike helmet is the most important way for your child to stay safe on a play vehicle, tricycle, or bike. A helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by 85 percent when worn correctly.

Toddler helmets are lightweight, because a toddler's neck is not strong enough for a regular helmet. Also, these helmets come down low around the back of the head for more coverage (**D**).

Choose a helmet that meets current safety standards. Look for a CPSC[1], ASTM[2], ANSI[3], or Snell[4] sticker inside the helmet. By 1999, every new helmet must meet the CPSC standard.

Insist that your child wear a helmet whenever she rides. If your child's preschool uses tricycles, work with the school to make helmets available. Urge the school to have a policy requiring helmet use.

The right fit

- Make sure the helmet covers the upper part of the forehead and sits level on the head.
- Use the foam pads inside to fit the helmet snugly so it doesn't slip around.
- Adjust the chin strap tightly enough so the helmet pulls down when the child opens his mouth.

[1]Consumer product Safety Commission
[2]American Society for Testing and Materials
[3]American National Standards Institute
[4]Snell Memorial Foundation

Carrying your child safely on a bike

Never carry a baby under age one on a bicycle. A baby does not have the neck strength to wear a helmet. Her back is not strong enough to sit straight with the motion of the bike.

When a child is old enough to ride on an adult's bike, only a skilled rider should carry him. Ride only in safe areas like parks, bike paths, or quiet streets.

- Make sure both adult and child wear properly fitting helmets.
- Make sure the child carrier has a high back, a lap and shoulder harness, and foot guards to keep feet away from the spokes.
- Check that the carrier is fastened firmly to the bike.
- Buckle the harness snugly around the child.

For more information, call the NHTSA Auto Safety Hotline: 1-888-DASH-2-DOT or visit the NHTSA web site, www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

See Tip Sheet #11 for pedestrian and bicycle safety tips for school-age children.