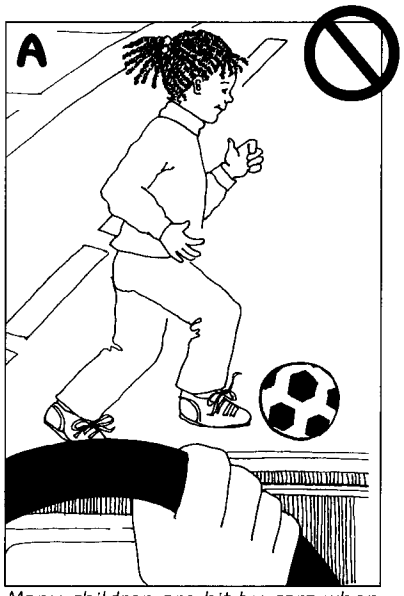
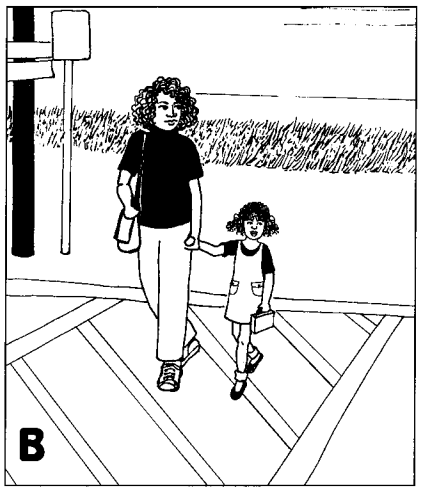
Tip #11

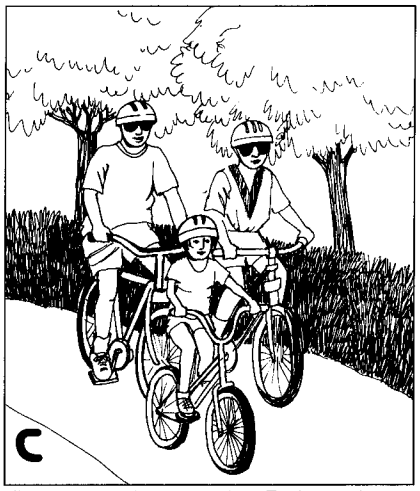
kids on the move: walking and biking safely (kindergarten to grade three)



Many children are hit by cars when running into the street.



Help your child practice crossing streets safely.



Set a good example. Ride with your child and wear your helmet!

Learning to be traffic smart

Children in kindergarten through third grade are learning to become independent. They enjoy walking, riding bikes, and playing outside. They don't have the judgment to cope with traffic by themselves yet, but they can begin to understand safety rules.

What parents need to know: *the bottom line*

- Parents often think their children are able to handle traffic safely by themselves before they actually are ready.
- Children don't have the skills to handle these risky situations until at least age ten.
- Boys are much more likely than girls to be injured or killed in traffic.
- Bicycles are vehicles. Children should not ride bikes in the road until they fully understand traffic rules and show they can follow them.

Young children are NOT small adults!

1. They often act before thinking and may not do what parents or drivers expect.
2. They assume that if they see the driver, the driver sees them.
3. They can't judge speed and they think cars can stop instantly.
4. They are shorter than adults and can't see over cars, bushes, and other objects.

Walking Risks

Nearly one third of the five- to nine-year-old children killed by motor vehicles are on foot. They are hit by cars most often when playing near home. They tend to run into the street in the middle of the block, where drivers don't expect them (**A**).

Bicycling Risks

Children can be hurt riding on or off the road. Many children who are killed in bike crashes are 7 to 12 years old. The most serious injuries children get while biking are head and brain injuries. Head injuries can cause death or lifelong disability.

Take steps to safety

Set limits for your child

As your children grow, set appropriate limits on where they can walk or bike safely. Don't expect them to be responsible or to start to behave safely until age ten.

Find safe places for riding and walking

Find places away from streets, driveways, and parking lots. Good choices are fenced yards, parks, or playgrounds.

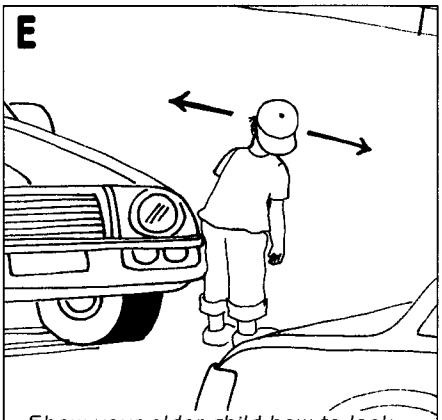
Teach safe walking habits

Begin to teach your child about how to cross streets safely (see next page). Give them plenty of chances to practice when you are with them (**B**).

Set an example yourself

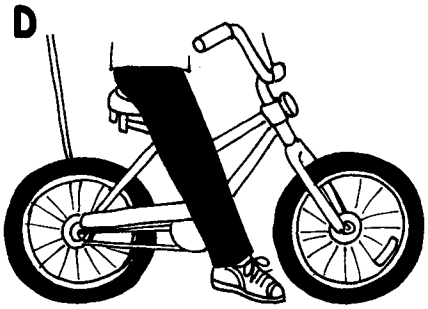
Young children learn by watching their parents and other adults. Cross streets properly and always wear a helmet when you ride a bike (**C**). When you are driving, obey speed limits and watch for children.

E



Show your older child how to look around parked cars or objects blocking her view of traffic.

D



A child should be able to have his feet flat on the ground when sitting on the bike seat.

F

NO!

Incorrect fit: *This helmet is too far back on the head and will not protect the forehead.*

YES!

Correct fit: The helmet must cover the upper part of the forehead to cushion it from serious impacts.

Remember to replace a helmet if it is damaged or in a crash.

Teach the "Safe Street Crossing" Method. Teach your child to:

1. Cross with an adult or older friend. (Young children still need supervision around traffic up to at least age ten.)
2. Cross at a signalized intersection, when possible.
3. Use the crosswalk when crossing near a corner. Watch for turning vehicles.
4. Stop at the curb. Look left, right, left, and over your shoulder for traffic. Continue to look as you cross.
5. Stop to look around parked cars or other objects that block the view of traffic (**D**). Let oncoming traffic pass, then look again before crossing.
6. Make eye contact with drivers to make sure they see you.

Help your child bike safely

A kid-size bike is right

A big bike "to grow into" is not easy to learn on or to ride safely. A child should be able to sit on the seat with knees straight and feet flat on the ground (**E**). Also make sure he can straddle the bike with at least one or two inches between the top bar and crotch.

Insist on bike helmet use

A brain injury cannot be cured! Bike helmet use can reduce the risk of head injury by 85 percent when worn correctly. Make it clear to your child that she must wear a helmet on every ride. It also is important to wear a helmet when doing other sports, like in-line skating and skateboarding.

Selecting and fitting a bike helmet

- Choose a bike helmet that meets current safety standards. Look for a CPSC[1], ASTM[2], ANSI[3], or Snell[4] sticker inside the helmet. By March 1999, every new bike helmet must meet the CPSC standard.
- Use foam pads inside to fit the helmet snugly so it doesn't move on the head.
- Fit the helmet so the front is just above the top of the eyebrows. Teach your child to wear it this way (**F**).
- Adjust the two side straps so they meet in a "V" right under each ear.
- Adjust the chin strap snugly under the chin. Make it tight enough so the helmet pulls down when the child opens his mouth.
- Check often to make sure straps stay snug and the helmet stays level on the head.

Encourage your child to wear his helmet

- Let your child help choose the helmet.
- Explain that a helmet is "just part of the gear," as it is with football, race car driving, or hockey.
- Praise your child for wearing his helmet.
- Talk to other parents, so that all neighborhood families encourage the same safety rules.

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

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

See Tip Sheet #10 for pedestrian and bicycle safety tips for toddlers and preschool children.

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