

Staying Safe on the School Journey



Information for parents and schools

INFORMATION SHEET FS02

Introduction

Everyone wants to be healthy and make informed choices about the way they travel. Children can prepare for this early on in life by playing outdoors, exploring the local area and learning how to travel around on their own. The school journey is a great opportunity for young people to learn to handle themselves and develop independence.

Safe Routes to Schools projects are in place all over the UK. These projects enable young people to make journeys in a safe and active way. Schools work with parents, local authorities and organisations like Sustrans to explore all of the issues related to the school journey and come up with solutions.

This factsheet is designed to help schools and parents deal with some of the safety issues which might come up when thinking about children travelling independently.

As well as giving personal safety tips and guidance on safe cycling and safe walking, it provides information on hardhitting issues such as stranger danger and road traffic accidents. Read on to find out how walking and cycling to school can be the safe option!

Growth of fear

A recent survey of over 1,000 children⁽¹⁾ found that the choice to remain indoors is made because of an increasingly unrealistic assessment by children and their parents of the risks of the outside world.

Media attention on stranger danger and abduction has naturally added to parental concern about allowing their children more freedom, but does not reflect any real increase in such crimes. Between 1985 and 2004 in England and Wales there was a small but notable rise in the number of children who were killed by persons known to them,⁽²⁾ yet over this same period the numbers of children killed by strangers has shown no increasing trend.⁽³⁾

Unfortunately, a distorted understanding of the threats posed to children has resulted in a massive restriction in their independent mobility. Children are often driven to school and stay indoors for play, where they are more likely to become unfit and overweight. According to recent reports, obesity is a far greater threat to children than abduction.⁽⁴⁾

Fact! Between 1985 and 2001 the number of children killed by strangers, although varying from year to year has



Department for
Transport

The **Safe Routes to Schools** project is co-ordinated by Sustrans and provides support to local authorities, schools and parents. Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity and works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to benefit health and the environment.

National Cycle Network Centre, 2 Cathedral Square, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5DD



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shown no increase in trend. The total number of abducted in 2001 was 263, although most of these were carried out by estranged parents.⁽⁶⁾

Action! It is helpful to talk over any fearful issues from the media and discuss ways in which children can stay safe.

Road Safety

A more realistic worry for parents is the amount and speed of traffic on the roads. A child is 50 times more likely to be killed by a motorised vehicle than by a stranger.⁽⁶⁾

Encouragingly, the number of child pedestrians killed or seriously injured in the UK has fallen dramatically in the last ten years and cycling is also becoming safer, with the number of fatalities falling by 12% to 114 in 2003.⁽⁷⁾ Despite such positive trends, road safety is still a problem in many areas leading some parents to drive their children to school, which only adds to the problem of too much traffic. Safe Routes to Schools aim to provide more sustainable solutions to parent's worries about road safety.

Denmark had one of the worst child pedestrian accidents rates in Europe until new legislation made police, schools and local authorities more responsible for protecting children on the journey to school. A programme of speed limits, traffic calming and designated living streets with pedestrian priority resulted in a reduction in serious injuries by 78%. Now 60% of children in Denmark cycle to school.

In the UK, schools and local authorities are working on Safe Routes to Schools projects as a way of giving young people safe journeys

to schools. These schemes result in lower casualty rates and are a positive way of making sure your child is safe.

Fact! In Dorset, almost 75% of all child casualties in rural districts were car occupants, not pedestrians or cyclists.⁽⁸⁾

Action! Find out what your local Road Safety Team can offer your school - they may have resources, be able to offer training or run an assembly.

Speed on the roads

Driver error is found to be a contributory cause in over 90% of accidents;⁽⁹⁾ and speed plays a major role. In residential areas where car speeds have been reduced from 30 to 20 mph, child pedestrian casualties have fallen by 70%.

Many schools in Scotland have '20's plenty' speed restriction zones and throughout the UK 20 mph zones are becoming more common place. According to the Slower Speeds Initiative, improving safety through reduced speeds is a major element in restoring some lost freedoms, such as the freedom of children to play in the streets or walk and cycle unaccompanied.

Fact! Hull's 20 mph zones have reduced the number of people killed or seriously injured by 90%.

Village traffic calming schemes have reduced all injuries by 25% and deaths and serious injuries by 50%. 20mph zones have reduced injury collisions of all severities by 60% and those involving child deaths and serious injuries by 70%.

Action! Discuss surveying speeds outside the school gate at your next STP meeting. This can be a great activity for children to do as part of classroom work in all year groups.

Being Streetwise

Children are under adult supervision for a greater period of their lives than their parents were a generation ago, depriving them of the ability to explore and negotiate their environment. If children don't have the opportunity to get streetwise they may be more vulnerable to bullies and antisocial behaviour. Enabling children to make safe journeys independently is a way for them to learn how to deal with real life situations in a responsible way, which is essential to normal development.

Fact! In 1989, 62% of primary school children walked to school, in 2004 the figure had dropped to 54%.⁽⁹⁾

Action! Your children could start making short journeys by themselves, to a neighbour or local shop. Walk or cycle with them to school so they are familiar with the route. Let them tell you when they are ready to make the journey themselves or with friends.

Staying visible

Whether you are on the roads or the pavements it's important for both cyclists and walkers alike to be seen. High visibility clothing and accessories helps other road users to see you when you are out and about.

Action! Your local authority may be able to provide you with details of a local supplier – or you can order child and adult size tabards from Sustrans directly.

Antisocial behaviour

Bullying and anti social problems can be an issue on the school journey and might discourage pupils from walking or cycling to school. Schools can help to counter bullying by setting up cycle and walking policies where anti social behaviour is prohibited. A school council should be involved in drawing up and implementing any policies and could draw up an anti bullying code.

Walking with friends, or setting up formal buddy systems (where two people who live near each other take responsibility for walking together) can be a solution for young people.

Fact! There are loads of resources to help deal with bullying, the Beat Bullying website is a good starting point, www.beatbullying.org

Action! Ensure all staff and volunteers are aware of the school's anti-bullying policy and encourage pupils to report any incidents of bullying to a responsible adult.

Personal Safety

There are great tips for young people on the Milly's Fund website, www.millysfund.org.uk about being safe on the streets, including:

- Look competent – obey the rules and make sure you are aware of your surroundings
- Avoid short cuts even if you are in a hurry
- Don't be afraid to pedal hard out of or around potential trouble
- Keep your bike in good working order – repairs are best done at home not on the road!
- Think about your route and plan ahead. Where would be a safe place to go if something went wrong? Safe places might be busy places like shops or garages, friends' houses or a police station.



- If possible, arrange to go with a friend or group of people
- Make sure you have a mobile phone (charged and in credit), phone card or spare change to make a phone call
- Make your parents/carers aware of your intended route and stick to it.

You'll find more top tips for both adults and young people on www.suzilamplugh.org. The smart kids game is a fun way for primary children and parents to start talking about safety issues.

References

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7. Surveyor (2004) 'Parental Guidance'
8. DETR Road Safety Division (1999) Speed Policy Review Discussion Paper
9. DfT (2004) Transport Statistics Great Britain, London: TSO



Further information

Visit the Safe Routes to Schools website www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk for:

- latest news and information on Safe Routes to Schools
- specific information on each of the UK regions
- downloadable resources including other information sheets
- case studies, curriculum materials and newsletters

For Safe Routes to Schools enquiries call 0117 915 0100 or email schools@sustrans.org.uk

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