



ACTIVE TRAVEL TO SCHOOL



MYTHBUSTER

All parents want their children to arrive at school safely and on time and most believe the best way to do this is to drive them right to the school gate. This in fact creates hazards for children as more cars travel around the school perimeter looking for parking, and move in and out of parking spaces. Just three decades ago, 70% of children walked or rode to school - now only around 30% do. Walking, riding, scooting or skating to and from school has so many benefits! With less traffic and parking congestion, our school becomes a much safer place.

Children are happier and healthier when they use active travel - they are meeting their 60 minutes of physical activity per day, exploring and getting to know their neighbourhood, and having fun with friends! Consider using active travel, and help your school community be a safe and healthy place.



MYTH 2

'There is more risk of stranger danger'

We know that stranger danger will always be a worry for parents. But if children are taught good road safety from an early age, it can help to reduce fears by allowing children to get to know neighbouring children, parents, their houses and the local community. Having more people walking the streets in fact reduces the risk of 'stranger danger' - more eyes on the street make it safer for everyone, and breaks down the 'stranger' barrier.

If you still feel worried about your child travelling to school on their own, try parking a small distance from the school (500m - 1.5km) and walk or ride the remainder of the way with them.

MYTH 1

'It's safer if I drive my child to school'

It's not! The greater the number of cars driving past the school, stopping to look for a park, reversing into and out of bays, doing u-turns etc, the less safe the school perimeter is. Studies show that more pedestrians on the streets make drivers slow down, and so kids walking to school helps to reduce the number and speed of cars.



MYTH 3

'I live too far from school to walk'

Do you know how far you live from school? Take a look on a map and work out the distance.

It's estimated that younger primary school children can walk 250m in five minutes, 500m in ten minutes (the time it takes to get kids in the car and drive them) 750m in 15 minutes and 1km in 20 minutes, and some will happily walk 1.5km in 30 minutes.

If you live further than 1.5km, or if you are on the way to work, how about just driving part of the way then walking with your young children to the school? By leaving your car a ten minute (or more) walk away from school, you'll be making sure your child gets exercise. Also you'll avoid congestion outside the school gates and get to work on time.



MYTH 4

'I save time driving my child to school'

By the time you've stopped at lights and signs, driven through 40km/h zones, gone around the block looking for a park...your child could have walked to school, and had a far nicer time than in the back seat of the car! The time taken for short car trips increases as more children are driven everywhere and traffic becomes worse.

The time spent looking for and sitting in a car park could instead be spent walking home and spending quality time with your child.



MYTH 5

'Walking to school will make my child tired'

Research has shown that children who do some form of exercise, especially a walk before school, arrive fit, refreshed, ready to learn and do better in class. Physical activity creates mental energy) and the chance to talk with friends on the way, rather than doing so in class. Walking home also allows children some 'head space' between one activity and another.

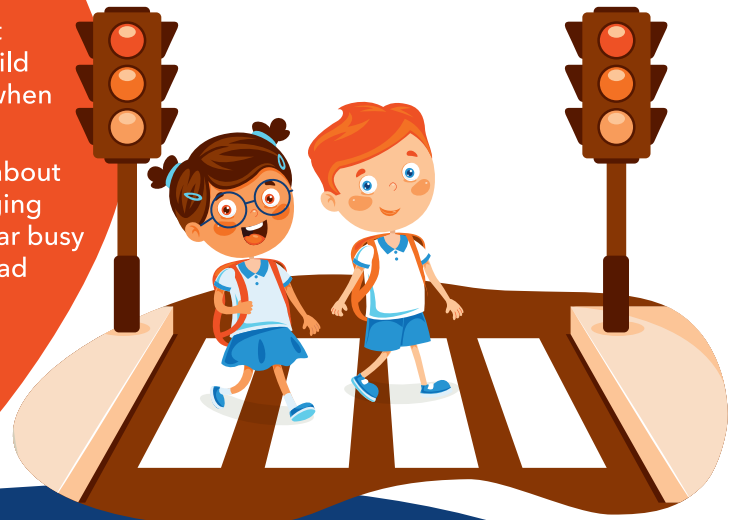
Give it a try and see if you notice an improvement in their concentration.

Myth 6

'My child has no road sense" (Part-Truth)

Children do not 'get' road sense automatically and they can't get it from the back seat of a car. The only way for them to build road safety skills is to practice and to be supervised in traffic when young.

Use the walk to school as an opportunity to teach your child about road safety and help them to build their confidence in managing risk. Showing your children how to spot risks and be safe near busy roads is one of the best ways to protect them. Practising road safety makes kids more aware, more confident, and safer around traffic. And gives you peace of mind as your children become more independent. "Letting go" is challenging but can be managed in stages, when you believe you've taught your child the skills they need.



Top tips for parents

- Set a good example by walking or cycling to local places, including school.
- Remember if the walk to school is too far why not park a few blocks from the school and allow your child to walk the rest of the way.
- Observe your child's behaviour and independence, and look for signs of readiness.
- Help your child become familiar with the local neighbourhood and identify the safest routes (e.g. where there are safe road crossings).
- Practice and reinforce the skills your child needs to travel safely, such as riding a bike and knowing the road rules.
- Slowly build independence by letting your child do things gradually. You could start by parking the car a few blocks from school and allowing them to walk the rest by themselves or arrange for them to walk with friends or neighbours.
- Make a plan with your child about possible strategies for when things go wrong, such as getting lost, if a stranger approaches them, or if they or their friend gets injured.
- Agree on a plan with your child for the transition towards independence, and set milestones and boundaries.
- Encourage kids who have built independence to walk to school rather than driving them on the way to work or other destinations.