



Back to School Safety Tips



Another school year has started. Getting back into the school-year routine can be daunting. The following safety tips can help to ensure your child(ren) get to and from school safely.

Heads Up - Phone Down

Texting and walking, or distracted walking, can be as dangerous as distracted driving. According to Parachute Canada, a child pedestrian is killed or injured every three hours. On average, 30 young pedestrians are killed in Canada each year and 2,412 are injured. In a 2014 poll, a fifth of 13- to 18-year-olds admitted that they did not always look when crossing the street and 15 percent admitted they often text while crossing. Half of the teens say that they have been hit or narrowly missed by cars while walking.

With increasing numbers of children and teenagers owning digital devices, children need to be aware of and practice basic safety tips:

- Do not walk, talk and text. If you have to talk or text, move out of the way of others and to the side of the walkway.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Do not cross or walk in the street while using an electronic device. Do not walk with headphones in your ears.

Walking to School

- Review road safety rules with children. Note the importance of not accepting rides or any invitations from strangers, and keeping focused on getting to school or getting home. Coordinate a buddy system with other children in the area who may also walk to school.
- Have practice walks with children to establish a designated safe and direct route to school. Hazards should be identified (i.e. train tracks, busy intersections).
- Stay on sidewalks whenever possible. If there is no sidewalk, use the left side of the road facing traffic.
- Cross streets only at crosswalks. Look to the left, the right and then left again before proceeding, even at intersections with pedestrian walk signs. Wait until traffic comes to a stop before crossing. Make sure drivers see you before you cross.

Additional Safety Tips

- Check with the school to see what policy it has regarding posting names and photos online. Identifying/personal information should not be posted in a public forum. If photos are posted, they should be group photos that do not identify individual children. Caution your child about carrying or wearing items that visibly display his/her name.
- If your child goes home alone, make sure the rules for safety at home are clearly understood. Make sure your child understands what to do in an emergency. Prepare an emergency contact list (kept close to the telephone) that includes phone numbers for you, 9-1-1, doctor, poison-control center and at least one other trusted adult.
- Discuss with your child what he/she should do if anyone follows, approaches or in any way bothers him/her. Include instructions to get away quickly, what to do if anyone tries to take him/her away, and to tell a trusted adult.
- Find opportunities or “teachable moments” to practice safety skills with your child. Create “what if” scenarios for your child to make sure he/she understands safety messages and how to use them in a real situation.

School Bus Safety

While school buses have an excellent safety record, accidents on the bus or outside the bus can happen. The following are some tips to ensure children get onto the bus safely and ensure safe travel:

- Arrive at the bus stop at least five minutes before the scheduled pick up time. Children should never run after the school bus to try to catch it. If they miss the bus, suggest they go back home or report to a teacher.
- Stay on the sidewalk, away from the roadway and stay back until the bus has come to a full stop and the door opens.
- If your child needs to cross the street, teach them to look both ways before crossing the street.
- Use the handrail when boarding or exiting the bus.
- Once on the bus, take a seat as quickly as possible. Put belongings under the seat and stay seated.
- When getting off the bus: take two large steps away from bus. If they must walk in front of the bus, have them walk ahead at least three metres (10 giant steps). The driver must be able to see children and will give a signal when it is safe to cross. Cross in a single file.

Safety Tips for Drivers

- SLOW DOWN. Be aware of children walking on sidewalks and streets. On streets without sidewalks or streets with on-street parking, it might be hard to notice children behind parked vehicles.
- On streets without crossing guards, watch out for children trying to cross the street. Be alert, children may dart into the street without looking.
- When approaching a stopped school bus, with alternating red-lights flashing at the top, drivers must stop before reaching the bus, whether you are approaching from the front or rear. Vehicles must not proceed until the bus moves or the overhead red signal-lights have stopped flashing.