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# Active Transportation for Children



## Trends in Transportation for Children

Driving children to school and other activities has serious consequences. School drop-off and pick-up trips create traffic hazards and poor air quality around schools. Car trips give children less opportunity to explore their own community. Without independent travel children delay learning about distances, travel time and navigation, and miss out on the educational achievement of planning and making their own short trips. Car trips also reduce opportunities for physical activity. Today there are nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there were in 1980.



## Benefits of Active Independent Travel

Teaching children to walk, bicycle or ride public transportation helps them grow to be healthy in mind and body.

- **Healthy Physical Activity**—Active children are healthy children. Walking, cycling and riding the bus (which incorporates walking) make exercise a part of daily life.
- **Readiness to Learn**—Studies show that children who walk and bicycle to school arrive more alert, eager and ready to learn.
- **Safer Communities**—Streets are safer when more people are out walking and riding bicycles.
- **Opportunities for Fun and Creativity**—For children, walking, bicycling and riding the bus are adventures! Active transportation is an opportunity for fun and creativity.
- **Neighborhood Awareness**—Walking, bicycling and riding the bus make it easier for children to meet neighbors and become familiar with the neighborhood.
- **Reduced Traffic Congestion**—Fewer cars on the road mean less pollution and safer, less congested streets.
- **Responsibility and Self-Esteem**—Walking, bicycling and riding the bus make it possible for children to travel independently, which teaches responsible decision-making, builds self-esteem, and frees you from time-consuming chauffeuring responsibilities.



## Ten Ways to Help Children Become Independent Travelers

1. Teach your child to walk and bicycle safely using written materials from **everybodyBIKE**, the bicycle education program for Whatcom Smart Trips. In particular, *A to Z by Bike* is an excellent guide for teaching safe bicycling. A complete list of education materials is available at [www.everybodyBIKE.com](http://www.everybodyBIKE.com) or call **671-BIKE**.
2. Participate in **everybodyBIKE** Full Cycle classes and Bike Skills Rodeos with your child. For a schedule of events contact [info@everybodyBIKE.com](mailto:info@everybodyBIKE.com) or call **671-BIKE**.
3. Give your child practice on streets and sidewalks. Ask your child to repeat safety rules for each situation that you encounter.
4. Model appropriate traffic safety practices when you are walking, bicycling or driving.
5. Teach your child to ride WTA buses. For assistance with routes and schedules call **676-RIDE**.
6. Walk or cycle to school with your child once or twice a week.
7. Organize a Walking School Bus – a group of adults and children who walk together to or from school on a safe route. For suggestions and assistance in organizing a Walking School Bus contact [info@everybodyBIKE.com](mailto:info@everybodyBIKE.com) or call **671-BIKE**.
8. Walk, bike or ride the bus with your child to play dates, after-school lessons and sports practice.
9. Choose to walk, bicycle and ride the bus for your own travel needs. You will be communicating loudly and clearly that these are fun, healthy and important forms of transportation.
10. Allow your child to make independent trips when you feel that he/she is ready.

## How Children See Traffic

As a parent you are the best person to know when your child has developed the skills and judgment needed for independent travel. For young children, it's important to understand their limitations in traffic situations.

Specifically, young children:

- Have a field of vision one third narrower than adults have
- Cannot readily tell from which direction a sound is coming
- Focus on one thought at a time
- Have a limited sense of danger and expect others to look out for them
- Overestimate their knowledge and physical strength
- Cannot easily judge a car's speed and distance
- Think that cars can stop instantly
- Do not understand complicated traffic situations
- Assume that if they can see a car, the driver can see them



## Walking Safety Tips

- Always walk—don't run—across streets
- Stop completely at all street corners
- Cross streets only at intersections and crosswalks
- Look left, then right, and left again before crossing any street
- Continue looking both ways as you cross the street
- Never dart out into a street or from between parked cars
- Walk facing traffic on sidewalks and paths
- Wear bright clothes or attach reflective tape or stickers during times of the year with limited daylight



When adults walk, bicycle and ride the bus, we create a cleaner, healthier and more vibrant community. When we teach children to make Smart Trips, we extend those benefits into the future. We also give children opportunities for fun physical activity and important tools for confident, independent exploration.