

Active School Transportation

It's smart: Children arrive alert and ready to learn (*their power of concentration is increased for up to 4 hours after a 20 minute walk!*)

It's active: Children accumulate additional daily physical activity. (ParticipACTION recommends children under 17 get several hours' worth of light movement throughout the day.) More than half the body's muscles are designed for walking; it is natural movement that is virtually injury-freeⁱ.

It's fun: Children who actively commute find joy in nature and connections with people along the way.

It's healthy:

Daily walking decreases the chance of chronic illness over time. (Each km per day decreases chances of obesity by 5%ⁱⁱ.)

It's eco-friendly: Up to 25% of the morning rush hour traffic is attributed to the school commute.ⁱⁱⁱ Walking to school cuts down car traffic and reduces carbon dioxide in the neighbourhood, especially near schools where children play.

Responses to Parent Concerns

"It takes too long"

- An average kindergartener can walk 800 metres in about 13 minutes.
- An average elementary school student walks 4.34 km per hour (and so would cover 1.6 km in about 22 minutes).^{iv}
- The World Health Organization recommends at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children. The walk can help them reach or exceed that goal every day.
- Some children are on the school bus up to one hour.
- Look into the possibility of using walking buddies, or a walking school bus, which would share the time parents spend leading children to school.

It's too far

- Build up stamina with daily walking; over a month's time, hikers have found a toddler can start at .09 km and build up to 3.2 km.
- Walking distances are shorter now than 25 years ago (how far did the parent walk to school?)
- Try using a bike or a scooter (if your school allows scooters).

It's too dark

- Bell times are selected to avoid travel in the dark as much as possible.
- Use reflective gear or reflective tape on backpacks, shoes, rain boots, and coats for overcast days.

My child has to walk alone

- Students in grades 4 and up are typically capable of traveling without parents on a populated route.
- We suggest accompanying younger children; many parents find this is a special time of connection. You might enlist a parent in the neighbourhood to share duties.
- Have you tried finding a walking buddy? Your principal may be able to help you.
- Walking School Buses can address some of these problems and you can approach your principal with the suggestion.

My child's sibling is on the bus

- Walking to school is the best way for both of your children to get to school, but the walking distance is lower for younger children because of the time it takes for them to walk.
- Spaces on the bus must be reserved for these smaller children.
- The Ministry of Education says that providing ineligible children with courtesy busing is an inefficient practice that adds to route times and increases the number of buses we have on the road.

My child will get lost

- Walk the route with your older child a few times until you're comfortable. This can take place before the school year begins or on weekends if you do not have the ability to accompany your child on school days.
- Look into the possibility of using walking buddies, or a walking school bus, which would mean your child will always be accompanied.

I (or a caregiver) can't accompany my child to school

- Walk the route with your older child a few times until you're comfortable. This can take place before the school year begins or on weekends if you do not have the ability to accompany your child on school days.
- Look into the possibility of using walking buddies, or a walking school bus.

The weather is bad/too cold!

- Most weather issues can be addressed with warmer (or water resistant) clothing.
- Sending them prepared for the walk means they're prepared for the rest of their outdoor time, too!
- Severe weather may happen a few times per year but building bus routes for unpassable weather that happens a few times per year is not best for children, it's not cost effective, and it's not good for the environment.
- Call neighbours or children's friends to carpool on rare occasions when the weather reaches below -19.

Sidewalks (or other infrastructure) are missing or inadequate

- Hazards are evaluated by STSTB; if you think you have one, please contact us to request for review.
- You can also call your municipality to notify them of missing infrastructure.

Sidewalks/trails have too much snow

- If snow clearance is an issue, call your municipality describe the problem and the spot.

There are dangerous strangers on the route

- The RCMP says that the odds of a child being abducted by a total stranger are approximately one in 14 million^v.
- Walking buddies and groups help to mitigate the risk.
- Walking and cycling to school presents an opportunity to develop traffic awareness skills, active travel skills, and independence in a graduated manner. Start by walking them to school, and then work with neighbours and friends to create a buddy system.

Dogs and wild animals pose a risk

- The chances of a having a negative encounter with a black bear is very low. In Canada, over the past 10 years, there have been 4 people fatally attacked by black bears. In comparison, 10 people *per year* are killed by lightning^{vi}.
- No dog is allowed to roam free; please call your local Bylaw Enforcement Department concerning any sightings.

Traffic exhaust along the walking route is unhealthy

- Children are more at risk of unhealthy exhaust air when trapped inside a vehicle.
- Even if they are bused to school, they still play on the school yard, so it makes sense to keep unnecessary cars and traffic away from school yards.
- If nine families switch from driving to walking the school route, they would prevent 1,000kg of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere.

I'm driving right past the school anyway

- How would it feel to send the kids out the door and have twenty minutes to yourself before you leave for work?
- You're doing your children a favour by allowing them to get the exercise and fresh air. As a direct result of inactivity, Canadian children are suffering from record levels of obesity, depression, heart disease, anxiety, and social isolation^{vii} and type 2 diabetes in children has increased in frequency around the world over the past 2 decades^{viii}.
- Try proposing a Walking School Bus so you can do duty once per week and others can lead on opposite days.

ⁱ <http://walkaboutns.ca/walkabout-info/inspiration/why-walk/>

ⁱⁱ Source: *Canadian Institute of Health Information. Improving the Health of Canadians: An introduction to health in urban places. Ottawa: Canadian Institute of Health Information, 2006.*

ⁱⁱⁱ What percentage of morning traffic congestion is caused by children being driven to school? [cited June 18, 2012]. Found at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/what-percentage-morning-traffic-congestion-caused-children-being-driven-school>.

^{iv} McDonald, "Children's mode choice for the school trip: The role of distance and school location in walking to school"

^v 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

^{vi} <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/lightning/frequently-asked-questions.html>

^{vii} <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/active-travel-charter-canadian-children-and-youth>

^{viii} <http://www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/kids-teens-diabetes/children-type-2-diabetes>