Children act differently in traffic than adults

Children are children, not young adults. It's important to understand their limitations in understanding traffic.

Specifically, children:

- Have a narrower field of vision than adults, about 1/3 less.
- Cannot easily judge a car's speed and distance.
- Assume that if they can see a car, its driver must be able to see them. However, children are easily hidden from view by parked cars and other objects.
- Cannot readily tell the direction a sound is coming from.
- May be impatient and impulsive.
- Concentrate on only one thing at a time. This is likely not to be traffic.
- Have a limited sense of danger.
- Often mix fantasy with reality.
- Imitate the (often bad) behavior of others, especially older children and adults.

Ten ways to help children become better pedestrians and cyclists

1. Give your child only as much independence and responsibility as s/he can handle safely. Throughout childhood, children slowly develop the cognitive, perceptual and sensory skills necessary to be safe in traffic.

2. Remember that each child is unique. Do not base rules for one child on those for siblings, cousins or neighbors. Children of the same age may require different levels of supervision in traffic.

3. Evaluate your child's behavior out of traffic. Is s/he impulsive? Does s/he stop to think before acting? Distractable? Can s/he sustain attention on something important? Is s/he a risk-taker? It is likely that your child's behavior in traffic will resemble behavior out of traffic.

4. Consider any limitations your child has and how these might influence his or her behavior in traffic. For example, does your child have vision problems? Hearing impairment? Cognitive or judgment limitations? Physical handicaps?

5. Give your child practice in traffic. Frequent supervised experiences can help children develop good traffic safety habits.

6. Teach your child the rules of walking and bicycling safety as you encounter traffic situations. Ask your children to repeat rules back to you.

7. Do not assume your child will follow the rules just because s/he can verbalize them. Let your child lead you in traffic to help you assess how well s/he follows the rules. Set up situations with your child in which you shadow him/her (walk 10-15 feet behind) to allow semi-independence.

8. Grant independence in small steps to see how your child handles it. For example, let your child progress from playing in front of the house to playing on the block, to walking around the block, to crossing one street, etc.

Children are not Young adults!

The excitement of your child's first steps. The thrill of their being able to balance a bicycle without training wheels. These are among the fondest memories of any child's growth and development.

For the child, these events are early steps towards independence. No longer are they dependent on their parents for mobility. But this independence is filled with hazards, as the unsuspecting child encounters cars, trucks and their drivers in what the child considers his or her play space.

Open this brochure to discover the problems children have in traffic, simply because they are children. You will also find ways to help your child become a better pedestrian and bicyclist, and for you to become a better driver.

9. Always model appropriate traffic safety practices yourself, whether you are walking, bicycling or driving! Children learn from important people around them.

10. Be a careful driver, watch for children who may not yet have developed good traffic safety habits. Their safety is in your hands.

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How Children See Traffic

Help your child be a better pedestrian and bicyclist

TransMadison
The Word is Getting Around