

# Walk to School

## Overview

By giving kids active and safe routes to schools, walk-to-school programs create a fun and fitness-promoting part of students' school day routine. A walk to school program is great for schools to promote active transportation for trips of less than one mile.

Programs frequently are structured to take into consideration the 5 E's of safe routes to school. The Five E's of Safe Routes to School include: Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation.



- Education - to teach pedestrian and bicycle/ walking safety
- Encouragement - to promote active transportation through events, such as walk and bike to school days
- Engineering - to improve the built environment to be more conducive for walking and biking
- Enforcement - to improve safety through partnership with law enforcement
- Evaluation - to assess, plan and implement programs that will improve participation and safety

## Take Action

Do your students live far from your school? Don't fret! Walk to School programs can be adapted for children who live in neighborhoods farther from the school and those living in neighborhoods without safe walking routes.

- Coordinate a **Walking School Bus!** A walking school bus is group of students walking to school supervised by one or more adults.
  - Offering a walking school bus at your school can be as simple as a few families taking turns walking their children to school or having a retiree serve as the “bus driver” each morning for a group of kids.
  - Arrange a **remote drop-off** for school busses or parents to stop at a crossroads ½ to 1 mile away from the school and have a walking school bus begin there. Here, adults are available to walk the kids the rest of the way to school.
  - Consider the location of your school and the needs of students. The remote drop-off program and walking school bus works best for schools in rural areas that have to travel farther to school. However, schools in suburbs or cities can adopt a remote drop-off program too, but may have to take extra precautions to make sure routes are safe.
- Implement a **Crossing the Street Program** to help educate students on safely arrive to school each day when crossing the street.
  - Host a school assembly to review the rules and primary skills on how to safely cross the street. Review crosswalk signs and traffic signals, reinforce crossing only at marked intersections, and talk about the importance of staying alert when walking or biking. This same curriculum could be integrated into PE or other areas of the classroom.
  - Play Red Light, Green Light! during recess and physical education or host physical activity stations related to crosswalk safety.
- Routes must be carefully selected after considering traffic conditions in the area where the school is located and speaking with local police and safety officials as to the feasibility for biking to school.
  - Work with school administrators and community leaders to review crosswalks near the school to make sure routes are clearly marked with proper signs and signals.
  - Communicate with community leaders about stationing police, crossing guards or parent volunteers around the perimeter of the school before and after school to help children safely cross the street, especially multi-lane streets.

# Social Emotional Health Highlights

Activities such as these help students explore...

**Self-Awareness and Self-Management:** Walking serves as a great opportunity for mindfulness and self-reflection. Not only does it get your blood flowing, but it also gets kids outside in nature which can serve as a refreshing environment to reflect on one's day and tool for better stress management

**Relationship Skills:** Walking to and from school is a perfect opportunity to ask children about their day, how they are feeling about school and other aspects of life and engage in meaningful conversations. Connect with neighbors in your community and join together to walk as a group.

## Tips



Not sure when you should get started? Consider piloting or launching your Walk to School initiative during National Walk to School Day (October each year) and discover!



Create and maintain safety guidelines. For example: Determine adult per child ratio (The CDC recommendation is 1:3 for children under 10; 1:6 for children over 10), ensure adults are at the start and end of the walking group, and confirm that students have basic transportation safety knowledge.



Be mindful of students with mobility, medical, cognitive, sensory, and social – psychological needs. Please keep in mind that some students either cannot walk within reasonable time period or may not be able to follow directions consistently enough to be safe. Schools



Designate a Safe Routes to School champion in your school building to be responsible for overseeing the program. Encourage them to reach out to a Safe Routes to School partner in your state for resources, technical assistance and support.

enough to be safe. Schools should use their discretion when determining if students are capable of participating in these programs.



Organize and train parent and community volunteers who can help chaperone the walk. Clearly outline their roles and responsibilities. You may also consider recruiting participation from older students to be leaders and role models for Walk to School programs, serving as crossing guards and participants.



Map the route and drop off point. Take time to find the quickest and safest route to ensure students are safe and on time for school. Create a flyer with route, drop-off locations, timeframes, and other important information to be sent home with students.



Be prepared. Have extra supplies on hand in case of emergencies such as first aid kits.



Starting small is okay! Start doing Walk to School days once a month until you can build awareness and increase participation.



Promote, promote, promote! Promote the program during Parent Teacher Association meetings, staff meetings, back-to-school packets, morning announcements and flyers around the school.



Consider providing brightly colored t-shirts or vests to parent and community volunteers so they can be seen and identified as Walk to School Ambassadors

For more activities and ideas like this one, be sure to [sign up for our news and updates](#). And if you like what you see, please [donate to support our work](#) creating more ways to help build a healthier future for kids.

# Resources

- General
  - A step-by-step guide for including Safe Routes to School in your Local School Wellness Policy:
  - Keep Walking to school all year round! Check out this [resource](#) for more ideas to keep the fun going!
    - Change Lab Solutions published a report [“On the Move: Safe Routes to School Policies in Rural School Districts.”](#)
- Walking School Bus/ Remote Drop Off
  - Learn general information on [Walking School Buses](#).
  - Be [trained](#) on how to start a walking school bus program with your students!
    - [Starting a Walking School Bus Guide](#) (National Center for Safe Routes to School)
- Crossing the Street Program/ Safe Routes
  - The [Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#) is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life for kids and communities by promoting active, healthy lifestyles and safe infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking.
  - The National Center serves as the information clearinghouse for the federal [Safe Routes to School](#) program. The organization also provides technical support and resources and coordinates online registration efforts for U.S. Walk to School Day and facilitates worldwide promotion and participation.
  - [Pedestrian Safety](#) (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)
  - [Pedestrian Safety Tips](#) (Safe Kids Worldwide)
  - [Active Transportation Alliance](#) (Active Transportation Alliance)
  - Click for more Safe Routes to School ideas!

# Related Activities

## **Bike to School**

A bike to school program is great for schools to promote active transportation along with a social opportunity for parents and students to connect outside of school hours and allow students to improve their bicycle safety skills.

## **Celebrate Walk to School Day**

International Walk to School Day is held each year in October. It's a great chance to get your school psyched about physical activity.

## **Walking Programs**

Walking is an activity that is easy and accessible to most students, staff and parents and can be made into an engaging, interesting activity in many ways.

## **Walking Trails with Fitness Stations**

Is your school looking for a sustainable way to provide more physical activity for students and families? Consider building a walking trail!