

Pedestrian Skills

For many of us, crossing the street is a common part of our routine; so common, in fact, many of us fail to recognize the 26-plus skills that we are using. These physical, perceptive, cognitive and critical thinking skills are developed as children grow. Adults may think because a child has learned basic safety rules, he is then ready to cross streets by himself. However, knowing the rules does not mean a child has developed the skills needed or the ability to apply the skills in different traffic situations. Many experts agree that children younger than 10 years of age do not have the skills necessary to safely cross a street without a responsible adult or older child present. Younger children lack the peripheral vision, depth perception, ability to judge speed and distance of traffic, along with other skills necessary to safely cross the street. It may take children with physical or developmental delays even longer to acquire pedestrian skills.

- **Look before crossing the street.** As adults, we train children to look left, right and left before crossing the street. However, in spite of this emphasis on looking, many children fail to look before crossing the street. Observations of children at street crossings have reported that as many as 50 percent of children fail to look before crossing the intersection. Even fewer children look behind them before crossing the street—a crucial error since the majority of intersections allow right turn on red.
- **Use visual and auditory skills.** It is not enough that the child look “left, right, left, behind” before crossing the street. Indeed, in studies of children who have been hit by a car, as many as 31 percent reported they did look in all directions before crossing the street. Depth perception, peripheral vision, and the ability to judge distance and speed often aren’t fully developed until the child is 10. Younger children also aren’t able to localize sounds—such as sirens—as well as adults.
- **Pay attention and resist distraction.** Children must also be able to determine which things they see are irrelevant (a bug that is on the pavement) and those things that are important (the large truck that has a turn signal on). They then must be able to focus on the task at hand, rather than becoming distracted by other things that they see.
- **Process information and use good judgment.** Children must be able to quickly scan the environment, process all the information, identify potential hazards, determine the potential consequences of those hazards, quickly determine a course of action and then act quickly. Once they begin crossing the street, they must continue to scan the environment and make adaptations to their initial plan. We have all started to cross a street, only to find that we have to walk more swiftly because a car is speeding toward us. Younger children often aren’t able to adapt or, in blind faith, believe that the car will stop.

Play an important role in protecting children by displaying a free sign which features colorful images of local children at play.

Individual signs as well as multiple signs for your neighborhood association, community organization, school or other group, are available. Signs can be picked up at La Porte Hospital, 1007 Lincolnway, La Porte using the Lincolnway entrance on:

**Friday, Aug. 14 from noon - 6 p.m. and
Saturday, Aug. 15 from 8 a.m. - noon.**

For more information, call (219) 326-2476

Kids dart.
Drive smart.
Riley Hospital *for Children*
La Porte Regional Health System


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Motorist Tips

Even the most mature and cautious child can become distracted and dart into traffic. As motorists, we can play a significant role in saving the life of a child.

- **Decrease your speed**, especially in posted school zones and in areas such as residential areas, parks, recreation facilities and libraries where there are likely to be children. No appointment or destination is worth the life of a child. The faster the speed of the vehicle, the more severe and potentially fatal will be the injuries to the child. A national survey conducted by SAFE KIDS in 2000 found that two-thirds of all vehicles were traveling over the speed limit in school zones!
- **Remain alert and focus on driving.** Children, particularly young children, are very quick and will dash in front of cars, assuming that you will see them and stop for them. Older children may become distracted as they think about the events of the day or socialize with their friends.
- **Be wary of residential streets with cars parked on the side.** Watch for children who are on the sidewalks, between parked cars or on the front lawn. The majority of children younger than 5 years of age are injured when they dart between parked cars in the middle of a block.
- **Obey stop signs and traffic signals.** Remember to stop before the crosswalk, not in the crosswalk. SAFE KIDS conducted a national observational survey in 2003 and found that 45 percent of vehicles did not come to a complete stop at stop signs. When they did stop, many stopped in or past the crosswalks.
- **Watch for pedestrians when turning right at a red light.** When we turn, we are often looking left to make sure another vehicle is not rapidly approaching. We also, however, need to be mindful that we scan the environment for children. Children are often so focused on looking left and right that they neglect to look behind them. Children also may assume that because their light says to “walk” all motorists will see them and stop.
- **When backing out, check for children and their toys.** Walk around the back of your car to look for children and their toys. The larger your car, the bigger the blind spot behind your vehicle.

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