



Traffic – A child’s point of view

Did you know?

Research on children in traffic suggests that children perceive traffic very differently than adults. Children under the age of nine usually don't have the ability to make safe judgments about traffic because they aren't developmentally ready to make good choices on their own. It is not their intelligence that is in question, say child development specialists, but rather their level of thinking and physical coordination.

- Young children can't see out of the corner of their eyes as well as adults can. They aren't able to see objects in their peripheral field of vision.
- It is often difficult for children to determine the direction that various sounds are coming from (e.g. a siren). They may turn the wrong way searching for a sound.
- Children may think large cars move more quickly than small cars, or narrow streets are less dangerous than wider ones.
- Young children can't pull together all the pieces of information they need to act appropriately in an emergency situation. Even if they have been taught the rules of the road, their brains can't process multiple pieces of information or a complex chain of events.
- Children lack a sense of vulnerability. They don't understand a car can seriously hurt or kill them if they are struck.
- Children have trouble judging how fast a vehicle is coming towards them or just how far away a vehicle is.
- Children like to keep moving! As a result, they may have trouble waiting for stoplights to change or for cars to stop at crosswalks before they step out onto the road.
- Although children may have been taught how to cross the street safely, they can be easily distracted and may respond impulsively.
- Children may simply believe grown-ups will look out for them. They think that if they can see an adult driving a car toward them, the driver must be able to see them too.
- Children's small stature means that they may not see hazards and drivers may not see them.

Speaking with children about traffic rules does not lead to safer behaviours. Walking with children and negotiating neighbourhood streets with them provides an experience and opportunity to develop traffic safety awareness, and to practice safe pedestrian skills.

This information has been adapted from the Pedestrian Crossing Control Manual for British Columbia, Parachute Canada and a list distributed by the Canadian Institute of Child Health.