

# Road safety

**Road safety is an important skill to teach all children and young adults. Typically, children are not ready to cross the road alone until they are eight years old. However, autistic children and young adults may need additional support beyond this age. They can be more at risk of being hurt or fatally injured while out in the community. It is important to start teaching road safety skills to your child from an early age.**

## What skills to teach?

Below is a list of skills to teach road safety to your child. They range from must-have skills to nice-to-have skills. Start by going through the hierarchy and identifying which skills your child already knows. Next, identify what is the next most important skill to teach in relation to their abilities.

### **Must-have skills: These are skills that are the most essential to have**

- Responds to their name when it's called
- Can cope with the various environmental sounds associated with traffic
- Responds and shows awareness to sudden loud noises
- Responds quickly when given an instruction e.g., stop, wait, no
- Walks up and down curbs and steps appropriately
- Stays with an adult and is happy to hold your hand
- Stays with an adult when out
- Stands and waits during transitions
- Responds to multiple people

### **Should have skills: These are skills that are considered necessary**

- Follows instructions in the context of an enjoyable activity
- Listens to instructions when crossing the road, e.g., listen, look, stay here
- Doesn't cross the road without an adult
- Crosses at the roadside, junction, zebra crossing, and traffic lights with supervision
- Stays on pavement or path
- Walks along the pavement safely
- Looks both ways to cross the street and scans for traffic while crossing
- Adapts to changes in schedule

### **Good to have skills: These skills are good to have but aren't considered the most necessary**

- Aware of common dangers e.g., wet floors, avoiding dog poo, broken glass
- Label emergency danger signs e.g., road closed, police
- Does not copy inappropriate instructions/ behaviours from others.
- Label and identify colours e.g., red, orange, green
- Label and identify adjectives e.g., fast, and slow
- Understand different lanes e.g., bus lane, and bike lane
- Match words with their corresponding signs e.g., road works, stop, traffic lights
- Label objects and pictures of common items e.g., car, bike, bus traffic lights, zebra crossing
- Aware of vehicles in car parks and on driveways
- Label and identify ongoing actions and pictures of these



### Nice to have skills: These are nice to have but are the most difficult to learn

- Can put in order a set of events e.g., crossing the road, traffic lights and zebra crossing
- Knows the contexts in which to call 999
- Answers questions regarding crossing the road safely
- Knows how to call emergency services
- Informs you if they have had an accident
- Answer questions regarding dangers on the road
- Knows where to obtain help
- Describes steps before and after in sequences of daily activity

### How to teach

More complex skills like the 'should have' skills can be broken down into smaller more achievable steps or actions. Work on each step individually then go on to the next step.

An example of broken-down steps for using a pedestrian crossing:

- Walking to the curb at the crossing
- Pressing the 'wait' button at the crossing
- Read the word wait on the yellow box
- Looking at the pedestrian traffic
- Wait for the green man
- Cross the street when the green man is showing

When teaching the less complex skills, such as the 'must have' skills, you may have to teach these skills many times throughout the day. Each time you begin to teach, do a test to see if they remember from the previous time you taught them.

You may have to work on practising holding hands or even waiting. Most of these skills can be taught and practised indoors, in a safe environment. You can use role play to do this to make it fun!

Some examples:

- Using a red man and green man to indicate stop and go while inside. This can be turned into a game to find a preferred item
- Role playing with traffic games or toy cars
- Playing games such as a treasure hunt, I spy or Simon says to practise skills such as waiting, responding to the word stop or identifying community signs
- Creating fake roads and pedestrian crossings inside to practise crossing

When your child shows sufficient progress on these skills indoors, give them the opportunity to put the skill into practise where they will need it, such as on the streets in their community.

When teaching, give clear instructions to your child so they know what to do. For example, by saying 'Let's cross the road' this indicates to your child that they must stop at the curb, look left and right and cross the street when it is safe to do so. Vary the instructions you give so they can understand every variation but respond the same. These instructions can be faded away when they become part of a larger sequence and you are looking to increase independence.

These skills do not have to be taught independently to each other. Some skills can be taught at the same time depending on the needs of your child.

Road safety can also be taught through visual stories or reading road safety-related books or related computer games. Whilst doing this, continue to model correct road safety behaviour to your child when they are out in public places. Label what you see and label the actions they are doing to encourage learning through observation.

Once your child has mastered a skill, create lots of opportunities to practise their newfound skills and give them lots of reinforcement when they use it in the right context. Giving specific social praise lets your child know what exactly they did right, for example "I like how you looked both ways before crossing the street".

### Other things to consider:

Sensory overload can sometimes be a barrier to road safety. Autistic children and young adults may have sensory differences and become overwhelmed by traffic or lights. Understand that your child may take a bit longer to work on some of the road safety skills because of additional barriers. By understanding what these barriers are, targets can be put in place to help lessen or overcome these barriers. See our **Understanding your child's sensory needs** factsheet for more information.

Consider what actions you can take to reduce them from feeling overwhelmed. Items such as ear defenders or fidget toys can be used to support this.

### Reference

ROSPA. (2021). Teaching road safety skills to children with additional needs. Available at <https://rospa.com/media/documents/road-safety/Teaching-road-safety-skills-to-children-with-additional-needs.pdf>