

What age can my child walk to school?

There has been a large amount of media coverage this week in relation to two young children independently cycling to school, which has led to the question, when is a child old enough to walk to school independently?

National charity Living Streets has been running the Walk to School campaign for 15 years to promote active lifestyles among young people and to encourage children to develop a sense of independence, road safety and community awareness. Our vision is that every child that can walk to school does.

As it stands, there is no set legal age that children can walk to school independently. The below extract is taken from 'Is it Legal? A parent's guide to the law' by the Family and Parenting Institute and it states:

"There is no law prohibiting children from being out on their own at any age. It is a matter of judgement for parents to decide when children can play out on their own, walk to the shops or school".

Some boroughs or authorities will offer guidance on what age they believe children can travel independently, which will vary from area to area. Schools also often have their own policy outlining their expectations. Parents are legally obliged to ensure their children get to school, but this in itself does not disallow independent travel.

Living Streets position is that there is no set age when a child is ready to walk to school independently. Parents should assess the risks associated with the school route and their own child's confidence. Parents should work with children to build up their independence while walking to school through route finding, road safety skills and general awareness.

There are lots of ways you can prepare your child to make an independent journey and we believe there is no substitute for real-life experience, learning together from an early age. Living Streets believes that children who are driven to school do not have the opportunity to develop road awareness and are therefore more vulnerable when they start to walk to school independently. Statistics from the Department of Transport shows that an 11-year-old starting secondary school is almost twice as likely as a 10-year-old at primary school to be killed or seriously injured in road collisions. We believe this is due to children being taken to school accompanied and not learning road safety skills before being deemed 'automatically' to be old enough to walk independently for secondary school. We believe that by teaching children independence to walk to school from an earlier age can greatly reduce this figure.

But it's not just the commute to school which can give a child independence and the ability to access risk. The number of children allowed out to play on the streets around their homes has seen a sharp decline. Our report 'No Ball Games' ([link](#)) shows how things have changed on our streets across three generations, turning our streets from happy hubs for the community, to no go areas for children.

During Walk to School Week 2010, we partnered with charity Parentline Plus to explore the perceived barriers that prevent parents from allowing their children to walk to school. Parents' fears included the fear of traffic and stranger danger, with only a small percentage concerned about the level of physical activity of their

children. Later this year, Parentline Plus will be offering an online resource on safely walking to school, assisted Living Streets' expertise.

The Walk to School campaign reaches 1.6 million children each year. We offer support to teachers and parents across the UK including:

- Guides to campaigning
- Information, publications and toolkits online at www.walktoschool.org.uk and www.livingstreets.org.uk
- Direct support and information if you email us at walktoschool@livingstreets.org.uk
- We make policy calls for local authorities to provide safe routes to school for every child in the UK
- Short films on the benefits of walking to school
- Information, statistics and policy on walking to school
- Lesson plans, assemblies and activity sessions which fit into the national curriculum
- Regular and up to date communication through our e-newsletter

More information

http://www.walktoschool.org.uk/content/independent_walking.php

[http://www.familyandparenting.org/Filestore/Documents/publications/Is it legal 3rd ed.pdf](http://www.familyandparenting.org/Filestore/Documents/publications/Is_it_legal_3rd_ed.pdf)

http://www.walktoschool.org.uk/content/general_news.php?articleshow=216

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/CyclingAndWalking/DG_10036318