



# Walk or Bike to School

Encouraging a healthy lifestyle requires creative solutions that are both safe and fun.

Walking or riding a bike to or from school with adult supervision is a fun way for children to get physical activity; it is also a wonderful way to get students, teachers and parents exercising together.

## Benefits

- » Walking and biking improves children's physical health, especially bone, muscle and joint health; plus it decreases the risk of obesity.
- » Walking and biking improves children's mental health by reducing levels of stress, depression and anxiety.
- » Physical activity and fitness boost learning and memory in children.
- » When children are physically active before class, they are more likely to stay on task.
- » Active children are more likely to continue healthy behaviors later in life.
- » Walking or biking to school helps children gain a sense of independence, and encourages them to socialize with others outside their normal group of friends.
- » Traffic congestion around schools is reduced.

## Getting Started

Each program will be different, based on the walking environment (sidewalks, streets, crosswalks, etc.), student interest, and school and community involvement. The following are some steps to get started:

- » **Make a plan and assemble a team.** The team should address several questions, such as:
  - > What kind of walking/biking program is envisioned: formal or informal?
  - > Are there resources or grants available to help with costs?
  - > When will this program be available? Will it be before school, after school or both?
- » **Plan the route(s).** Having planned routes is important for safety and accessibility. Check that the routes are well-lit, have good sidewalks or pathways, have the fewest major intersections possible, and are accessible to students. Get input from local law enforcement, parents, and other community members to assure it is the safest route possible. It might be necessary to consider multiple routes from various areas of the town.
- » **Time the route(s) to determine the amount of time it will take.** Allow extra time for students to prepare for class, eat breakfast before school starts, or adjust for inclement weather.
- » **Create a map that shows the route(s) and remote start locations.** Share this map with parents at the start of the school year. This handout can also include guidelines for participating in the program.
- » **Make it fun!** With permission from the proper authorities, use temporary paint to mark the route(s) for easy recognition. Consider painting words of encouragement, drawing the school mascot, or other creative ways to brighten up the route(s).

# Solutions to Perceived Challenges

Challenges	Solutions
Children live too far from the school or there are many that live in a rural setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Select a starting point, such as a church, park, or other well-known landmark as a meet and walk location.</li> <li>» Buses or parents can drop off students at the location and volunteers walk them to school as a group.</li> </ul>
No buy-in from administration	<p>A supportive administration can open doors for program implementation and build volunteer, staff, and student support.</p> <p>Create a program plan and outline for the administration to review.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Identify potential challenges, plans for safety and benefits of a walk/bike to school program.</li> <li>» Provide contact information to other schools in the area or districts that already have a program in place; this could be an opportunity for the administration to contact those schools and receive feedback.</li> </ul>
Lack of volunteers	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends one adult per three children ages 4-6, one adult per six children ages 7-9; fewer adults may be necessary for children ages 10 and older.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Identify staff at the school who would be willing to help.</li> <li>» Encourage parents and PTO/PTA members to volunteer as “bus drivers”/ leaders or crossing guards.</li> <li>» Invite community members from local neighborhoods or older students to walk with children.</li> </ul>
Safety concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Use sidewalks or paths whenever possible. If there are none available, walk or ride as far from traffic as possible.</li> <li>» Cross at signalized intersections and always obey traffic signs and signals.</li> <li>» Provide students with safety cards that teach them when/where to cross a street, which direction to walk, and other important safety tips. Have the volunteers review the safety cards with the children.</li> </ul>

## Additional Implementation Tips

- » Complete a walkability checklist to assist with initial planning.
- » Attract and retain students with fun and safe activities along the route.
- » Provide small prizes for students who participate regularly.
- » Invite guest walkers such as the school principal, police chief or other prominent community members.
- » Host special themed walks such as grandparents’ day, parent/guardian day, Earth day, etc.
- » Respond quickly to safety concerns and student behavior issues. Address issues as needed to maintain and improve the program.
- » Promote the program online and directly to the community. Highlight success, and regularly update the school administration, board members and any other interested group.
- » Check out success stories featured in the Sunflower Spotlight on [www.kn-eat.org](http://www.kn-eat.org) for more ideas.

Questions? Call Child Nutrition & Wellness at 785-296-2276.  
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