

# Program Variations

## Making Walk to School Fit in Your Community

After assessing your community, you may find that the Walk to School program needs to be altered for your neighborhood. Below are some ideas to help adapt the program to meet the special needs and conditions of your community.

### **Bicycling/Skating program**

Depending on your neighborhood, the comfort level of the parents, and the age of the participating children, the Walk to School program may include bicycles and in-line skates. Regardless of the mode of transportation, require everyone to wear appropriate safety gear, such as helmets, kneepads, elbow pads, and wrist guards, and be aware of other safety considerations.

### **Eyes on the Kids**

Some residents in the neighborhood along the mapped route to and from school may be enlisted as “eyes on the kids” for a few minutes each morning or afternoon. These neighbors can stand by their mailbox or sit on their porch as the children pass by on their way to and from school, remaining available for any emergencies. This additional supervision and source of assistance will increase the number of community members who are able to participate, even if it’s only for a few minutes each day. Experience has shown that the more community members who are involved, the more the community feels that it owns the program. This sense of ownership and responsibility helps the program continue once the initial enthusiasm fades. A participating home can be identified by a sticker on the mailbox or a flag in the yard to let children know that this is an “eyes on the kids” home.

### **Walking Buddies**

A few older children may want to walk together without parent escorts. It also may be possible for a reliable and mature older child to escort a younger child to and from school each day. These options work well with the “eyes on the kids” variation.

### **Carpool**

On days when it is necessary to drive children to school, implement a carpool plan. Have the children walk to one central location to meet the adult who will be driving them to school so that they are still able to include some physical activity in their trip to school.

*\*Every vehicle should be properly equipped with a safety belt for each passenger and all children under 12 should ride in the back seat.*



## **Park and Walk**

If a neighborhood is too far from the school for children to walk all the way, coordinate a walk-to-school program from a park or neighborhood closer to the school. Instead of carpooling the children all the way to the school, stop at a spot with an appropriate walking route, park the car, and walk with the children to school. This will get everyone excited and reduce congestion around the school.

Another variation of park and walk is to work with a neighborhood that is closer to the school and set up a walk-to-school program. Carpools from distant neighborhoods can join the group and walk to school from this neighborhood. This setup takes some planning and collaboration among people in your neighborhood and those in the neighborhood closer to the school.

## **Bus Stop Pickup**

To reduce the number of stops that a bus makes and to get children who must ride the bus to and from school to be more active, have children walk in groups accompanied by adults to one central bus stop in your neighborhood.

## **Walking in Different Seasons**

Changing seasons bring changing weather. Some of the enthusiasm of the group may be lost as the weather turns bad. The group should come up with incentives to continue walking in less favorable conditions.

### **Time Changes:**

- As the time changes in your area, there may be periods when the children are walking in the dark. In darker hours of the day, they should wear reflective clothing to alert motorists that pedestrians are present.
- During the lighter hours of the day children should wear bright colors to keep them visible to drivers. Bicyclists should use flashing bicycle lights during darker hours of the day.
- Put reflective tape on all sides of children's umbrellas to ensure they are visible when it is raining.

### **Hot Weather:**

- Encourage children to wear sunscreen, sun visors or hats, and light clothing.
- Children dehydrate faster than adults do, so it is important for them to drink water as they are walking. Suggest to parents that their children have water bottles for the walk to and from school.
- Be aware of the symptoms of heat exhaustion, which include weakness, fatigue, dizziness, muscle ache, headache, profuse sweating, rapid heartbeat, intense thirst, hyperventilation, and elevated temperature. If these symptoms occur, contact emergency medical assistance immediately.



## **Cold Weather**

- Although walking raises your heart rate, which warms the body naturally, it is important for children and adults to bundle up and layer clothing in cold weather and wear hats, gloves, and warm socks.
- Contact your local transportation department and ask them to clear the snow off of the sidewalks on your route.
- In addition, be aware that ice on the road, poor visibility, and heavy rain can send a car or bus off the road in your direction.

## **Organizing in Multicultural Neighborhoods**

Organizing a Walk to School program in multicultural communities poses unique challenges due to language barriers. Ask local government agencies, private advocacy and service organizations, religious institutions, mediation services, and other groups for help with translation. Translation is also essential when you are planning fliers, letters, and meetings. Multilingual children may be an excellent source for translation and for helping their parents understand the Walk to School programs and how they may participate.

## **Crime and Violence**

For some neighborhoods, violence and crime may be a minor issue; for others, it may be a daily presence. The threat of any kind of violence can keep students away from school and leave them in fear every day. It is important to identify and eliminate neighborhood trouble spots before implementing the Walk to School Day program. The Walk to School program may be a minor deterrent to crime because most criminals attack victims who are alone.

By having an organized group of neighbors, you are already one step ahead in forming a neighborhood watch program or making other community changes. Remind neighbors to report crimes or suspicious activities to police immediately and contact your local police department to let them know you are interested in starting a neighborhood crime watch.

