

Back to School Safety

When parents talk about school safety these days, they're usually referring to the surge in violence at schools. But research shows that school-age children are actually nine times more likely to sustain an unintentional injury -- whether on the playground or in school -- than to be the victim of violence while at school. In fact, an estimated 2.2 million children ages 14 and under are injured in school-related accidents each year, according to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign.

Accidents can be prevented if parents are on the lookout for potential hazards. To help you keep your kids free from harm, here are some safety tips from SAFE KIDS, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Traveling To and from School

- Plan a walking route to school or the bus stop. Choose the most direct way with the fewest street crossings and, if possible, with intersections that have crossing guards.
 - Walk the route with your child beforehand. Tell him or her to stay away from parks, vacant lots, fields and other places where there aren't many people around.
 - Teach your child never to talk to strangers or accept rides or gifts from strangers. Remember, a stranger is anyone you or your children don't know well or don't trust.
 - Be sure your child walks to and from school with a sibling, friend, or neighbor.
 - Teach your kids -- whether walking, biking, or riding the bus to school -- to obey all traffic signals, signs and traffic officers. Remind them to be extra careful in bad weather.
 - When driving kids, deliver and pick them up as close to the school as possible. Don't leave until they are in the schoolyard or building.
- If your child bikes to school, make sure he wears a helmet that meets one of the safety standards (U.S. CPSC, Snell, ANSI, ASTM, or Canadian). Research indicates that a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by up to 85 percent.
 - If your child rides a scooter to school, make sure she wears sturdy shoes, a helmet, kneepads and elbow pads. Children under age 12 should not ride motorized scooters, according to recent recommendations from the Consumer Product Safety Commission.
 - Teach children to arrive at the bus stop early, stay out of the street, wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before approaching the street, watch for cars and avoid the driver's blind spot.
 - Remind your children to stay seated at all times and keep their heads and arms inside the bus while riding. When exiting the bus, children should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop, exit from the front using the handrail to avoid falls and cross the street at least 10 feet (or 10 giant steps) in front of the bus.
 - Tell your child not to bend down in front of the bus to tie shoes or pick up objects, as the driver may not see him before starting to move.
 - Be sure that your child knows his or her home phone number and address, your work number, the number of another trusted adult and how to call 911 for emergencies.

