



## Being traffic savvy for children under 12 years



Tips for  
parents  
and  
caregivers



## Being traffic savvy for children under 12 years

Children want to explore the world. Outside, playing with friends. Learning to walk and to ride a bicycle. Naturally, they will also participate in traffic. How can you prepare your child for this?

### *Learning by doing (imitation)*

#### **Together on the road**

Road safety is learned in practice. By actively engaging in traffic, a child learns much more than it would by quietly sitting on the back seat of a car. You can help your child by taking him or her with you on regular walks or bike rides through traffic.

#### **Good example**

Young children watch their parents closely and copy much of their behaviour. They also do this in traffic. Children learn the most from 'adults who are important to them'. That's why it's important that you, as a parent, stick to the traffic rules: holding out your hand when taking a turn, stopping for a red light, looking left and right at a crossing, not using your phone when riding a bicycle or driving your car, and always wearing a seatbelt.

### *Road safety education from year to year*

Safely participating in traffic and the correct application of traffic rules is difficult for children and requires lots of practice.

## 0 to 2 years

Babies and toddlers pay close attention to their parents. They learn a lot about how things work in life and in traffic, without the parents even noticing it. Crawling and walking, they go out and explore, without knowing what dangers may lurk. Social imitation begins at 7 months, imitating everyday things after the first year.

### Going out together

It is good to take your child out regularly. In the stroller, by hand or on the bicycle. You can tell your child about what you see and hear. Make sure you stick to the traffic rules: your child notices more than you may think.

### Learning to walk

Young children aren't always in control of their movements. Walking is literally about falling and getting up. It demands so much concentration that children barely have any attention left for watching their surroundings.



0-2  
years

2-3  
years



## 2 to 3 years

Toddlers are fast-paced and learn new words at an incredible speed. This makes it possible to really talk about traffic. Toddlers love learning new rules.

### Rules

If you head out together on foot or on the bicycle, you can explain that you have to stick to certain rules on the streets: pedestrians belong on the sidewalk, cars and bicycles on the roadway. You can also explain what you are doing: "We have to wait, because there's a car driving towards us and it has the right of way". Together, you can practice to 'stop at a red light and go at a green light', and to 'hold out your hand when taking a turn'. Your child can lead the way on familiar routes.

### You can practice 'crossing safely' with a fixed crossing ritual:

- Stop by the curb.
- Hold hands.
- Look to one side, and then to the other.
- No oncoming traffic? Then you may cross without running.
- Keep paying attention while crossing.

### Balance bicycle

Toddlers really want to learn to ride a bike. You can start with a tricycle or a balance bicycle. A balance bicycle has the advantage that your child can practice his balance and the direction it needs to look.

### 3 to 4 years

From about three years, children can already have some consideration for others. They have friends and want to play together, especially outside if possible. Toddlers love carrying out small orders, but aren't reliable yet. They can forget everything and just run across a street.

Some toddlers are already learning to ride a bicycle. At this age, it's really still a game. Cycling in traffic is still too difficult.



### More independent

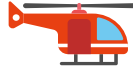
Your child can function a lot more independently in traffic. You can start practising with crossing a quiet street, at a cross walk and at traffic lights. Give a compliment if this goes well. In the meantime, make sure that you are also following the rules that you are teaching your child.

### Repetition

Young children love regularity and repetition, also in traffic. You give your child something to hold on to by taking fixed paths, crossing at fixed places and using a fixed ritual. This helps you to gradually move towards more independence. First, you show your child what to do, then you do it together, and finally, you give your child more and more responsibility.

### Blinders

Young children have a more limited field of view than adults. An adult can look around half a circle without turning his head. A child's field of view is much narrower, almost like wearing blinders. Children can't properly perceive what is happening at the edges of their vision. A wider field of vision only develops around the 10th year. To properly look around, children need to turn their heads to the left and right. Something to pay extra attention to when you cross a street. As a motorist, you should assume that a child doesn't see you until it looks straight at your car.



4-6  
years

## 4 to 6 years

For children, the world is getting bigger: they are going to school, making friends, they want to play outside and learn to ride a bicycle. At this age, children still have little awareness of danger. They still don't realize that "dying is forever", rather than a level in a computer game from which you can simply get up again. And even if they can tell you exactly what the rules are and if they really want to do it right, they can suddenly do something dangerous. Make clear agreements about playing safely outside: 'Always stay on the sidewalk'.

### Biking

Learning to ride a bicycle is complicated: pedalling, steering, holding out your hand, looking around. Children should practise long before they can properly master it. Cycling itself demands so much attention, that they have no regard for their environment and for traffic. You can teach your child to ride a bicycle in a quiet place without cars. Practice getting on and off the bicycle, braking (make an emergency stop) and making turns. Give your child a lot of time to practise. You can only cycle together on the street if your child doesn't wobble, looks around properly while cycling, and listens well. The safest approach is to let your child ride right in front of you, so that you can see what is going on and you can intervene when necessary.



### Looking around independently

Walking together is also important. You can ask your child to look around for himself and tell you when it's safe to cross. Keep in mind that your child will see less than you and that he can't estimate how fast a car is driving.

### See and be seen

Young children have a characteristic that adults often forget: they are small. Try looking at the traffic from your child's eye level: you have absolutely no line of sight. Children can't see any oncoming traffic over a parked car. On the other hand, they themselves are poorly visible to other road users. They disappear behind parked cars and other obstacles, and appear seemingly from nowhere to cross over.

### Listening

Children can listen perfectly, but they are not yet able to correctly determine from what direction a sound is coming and whether or not it is important to them. They don't respond or have a delayed response to warning sounds like squealing brakes.

### Attention

Children are constantly undertaking new activities that demand their full attention. Children can also be so engrossed in their game that they completely forget to look around when their ball rolls into the street.





## 6 to 8 years

Children know the traffic rules increasingly more and learn to empathize with others. Unexpected events, such as a car driving backwards, can still give them quite a fright. They can't necessarily apply something that they have learned at a certain place in a different situation.

### Gaining experience

It's important that your child gets lots of experience in traffic. It's a good idea to regularly take your child to school on foot or by bicycle. On the way, your child can do things by himself as much as possible. Additionally, you can walk and cycle along new routes, so that your child can get used to different traffic situations. Practice watching independently, looking at other road users and showing what you plan on doing (holding out your hand).

6-8  
years

### Making decisions

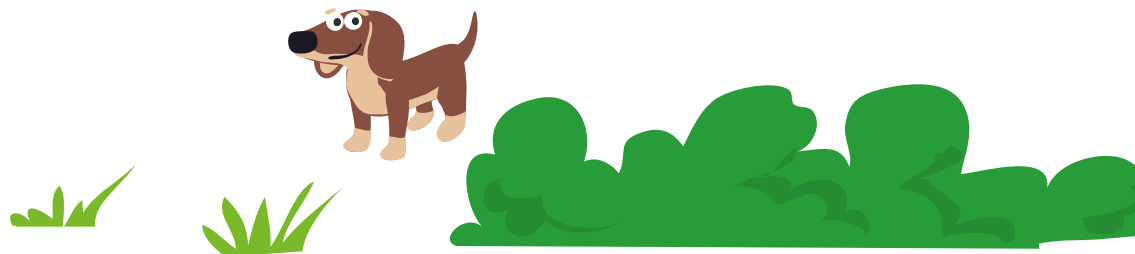
Children need more time to process information than adults. Which means that it also takes more time to make a decision. If something changes suddenly while crossing (traffic light jumps to red or a car comes around a bend), they tend to freeze on the spot. They don't immediately know what to do.

### Understanding

Safely participating in traffic requires knowledge of concepts such as right of way, speed and braking distance. You also need to be able to put yourself in other traffic participants' shoes. These are all things that children need to learn. Learning is only done in practice and with a lot of repetition. Because children learn by gaining experience and applying these experiences in new situations. This won't go smoothly right from the start. Children only learn something when they are ready to do so.

### Learning

You will also notice that learning has its ups and downs. Children often forget things that they already knew and were able to do. They are then in a growth phase that requires all their energy. Have patience, the teachings will come back again, as long as you keep on practising. It does mean that you, as an adult, must always keep in mind the unpredictable behaviour of children.





8-10  
years



### 8 to 10 years

The more often children ride a bicycle, the more skilled they become: they can steer and look around at the same time. They are also more aware of other road users. But they are also playful and easily distracted.

#### Alone in traffic

You can start giving your child more freedom. In general, children from 9 to 10 years can cross the street without guidance, as long as the traffic is not too busy, the child knows the rules and has often practised the route. Children of this age know most of the traffic rules and signs. They now have enough experience to deal with a dangerous situation. They have learned to estimate the speed of cars and take into consideration the behaviour of other road users.

#### Staying alert

The rapid assessment of new and complicated traffic situations is still quite difficult. Predicting what other road users are going to do also demands constant attention. You therefore need to continue practising together and look for busy streets and intersections. Teach your child to stay alert in the traffic, even if he has right of way or if the light is green.

### 10 to 12 years

Children are now old enough to understand traffic and to stick to the rules. At the same time, you will see that children of this age, especially boys, often take great risks. Being accepted by peers is so important that they sometimes get carried away in dangerous situations. The attitude of “you have to stick to the rules” shift to “let’s see how far we can go”. Thorough road safety education is now paying off: good traffic behaviour is ingrained.

#### Due consideration for others

For new routes, it’s best to ride with your child on the first trip. Along the way, you discuss the difficult traffic situations. Continue to emphasise how important it is to take other road users into account in traffic. You can also explain why using your phone while cycling is so dangerous. You can let your child experience it: ask your child to read an App while cycling a slalom, in a safe place out of the traffic.



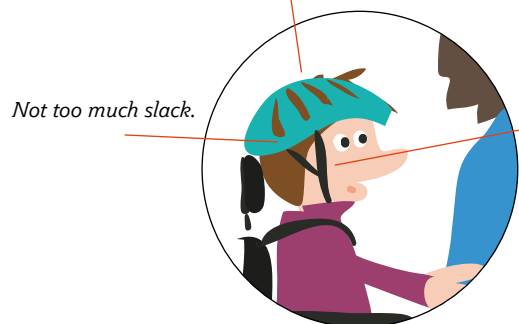
10-12  
years



## *Safely on the bike and in the car*

Carrying your child safely on a bicycle and in a car requires attention. If you want to take a baby on a bicycle, use the maxi cosi. You can attach it to the back and it's much safer than a carrying bag. If your child can sit, it can sit in a bicycle seat. Use a seat that matches the length and weight of your child. Good spokes guards on the bicycle prevent small feet from getting crushed. It is wise to have your child wear a helmet. Make sure the helmet fits properly.

*The front strap must be as vertical as possible. The rear strap meets the front strap underneath (not on) the ear.*



*Not too much slack.*

*Helmet straight about 2.5 cm above the eyebrows, do not let it slide backwards too much.*

In the car, the use of an approved and suitable child seat is mandatory. Make sure you firmly secure the seat itself and your child in it. While you are doing this, you can explain to your child why you are doing it. More detailed information about child seats is available on [www.veiligheid.nl](http://www.veiligheid.nl).

### **Want to know more?**

More information on road safety education can be found on [www.jonglereninheterverkeer.nl](http://www.jonglereninheterverkeer.nl) and [www.verkeerseducatiepunt.nl](http://www.verkeerseducatiepunt.nl).



### **Colophon**

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