



# How to Start a Walking School Bus



## What is a Walking School Bus?

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults supervising. That may sound simple, and that is part of the appeal. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a planned route with meeting points, visibility vests, a timetable and a schedule of trained volunteers. A variation on the walking school bus is a bicycle train where a group of children and adult leaders ride together to school.

**Is it safe to walk?** There is much research on the benefits of walking to school, yet many parents are reluctant to allow their children to walk to school because of safety concerns from traffic or issues they may encounter along the way. Organizing so that there is an adult along on the walk, or in some cases a trusted older student, can meet the safety concerns of families who live within walking or bicycling distance of school. Studies report that children participating in a walking school bus like the chance to socialize and spend time with friends (O’Fallon, 2001; Mackett, Lucas, Paskins, & Turbin, 2003). And parents appreciate having more time to themselves, making fewer trips to school and knowing that their children are supervised on the way to school (O’Fallon, 2001). If traffic conditions create safety concerns, a walking school bus program can help identify specific issues so they can be addressed. Significant safety issues should be fixed before establishing a walking school bus.

**Simple or complex?** Walking school buses vary in formality and structure, but all can help more children walk or bicycle to school safely. The following are some examples of walking school bus structure:

- Families in a neighborhood agree to walk to school together once a week.
- Families in a neighborhood organize a walking school bus schedule and meeting spot (much like a carpool) and agree to take turns walking with the neighborhood group to the school.
- Trained adult volunteers pick up children at designated spots and walk with them to the school.

**Who can be a Walk School Bus organizer?** A Walking School Bus can be organized by anyone who wants to help their own students or others in their neighborhood walk to school more often and more safely. Initial organizers are often neighborhood parents. If the program becomes more formal it can include more neighborhoods through PTA/O members, school nurses, PE teachers, A Safe Routes to School Coordinator or school principals.

**Start Simple** Start one small walking school bus and see how it works. A single neighborhood with a core group of parents and children are all that is needed. **Steps for starting simple:**

1. Families in the same neighborhood decide to walk together, often initiated by a parent with parents taking turns as the adult supervisor for the group.
2. A route is designed and tested by the adults. See [picking a safe route](#).
3. The group decides where to meet or whether to pick up students at their houses.
4. The walking school bus begins.

All walking school buses, regardless of size or formality, need a safe route and adequate adult supervision and participants should have an understanding of [pedestrian safety behaviors](#).



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## Pick a Safe Route

**Where the group will walk.** Choose sidewalks or paths wherever possible, keep the walk low stress.

**Where the group will cross streets.** Minimize the number of street crossings. Avoid busy, high-speed or multi lane roads, or when necessary cross at a marked crossing – preferably with a signal.

**How drivers behave.** Notice if they yield to walkers and drive at safe speeds. Some roads are more conducive to producing safer driver behavior. Watch especially for right turning cars.

**How the route feels.** Use a route that avoids potential problems like loose dogs, vacant buildings or streets with poor lighting.

**Map the Route.** A map is an effective tools for informing the school, parents and students where to expect to find you walking. It is useful for new walking bus members or adult supervisors.



## Pedestrian Safety Skills

Safe walking behaviors can be taught as a parent walks with a child or it may be included as an organized training. Regardless of how it is taught, children should know the following:

### 1. Always look for cars. Use your eyes and ears.

Drivers are supposed to obey the rules and watch for people walking. But you cannot count on them to always remember.

### 2. Choose the safest routes to walk with the fewest and safest streets to cross. Avoid crossing busy or high-speed roads whenever possible.

### 3. Walk safely. This means:

- Pay attention to the street and to cars.
- Use sidewalks or paths if possible.
- If there are no sidewalks or paths, walk facing traffic and on the edge of the road.
- Watch for cars turning or pulling out of driveways.

### 4. Cross at intersections. Use signalized intersections if possible.

- Cross in the crosswalk markings. If there is not a marked crosswalk cross in a straight line close to the intersection where you are visible to cars from all directions.
- Obey traffic signs and signals.
- Look for yourself to see if cars are coming. Look **left, right and left** and then behind you and in front of you for turning cars.
- Remember that just because it is your turn to cross does not mean that it is safe to cross. Do not trust that cars will obey the rules or that turning cars will see you.
- Walk**, don't run across the street.

### 5. If you must cross a street where there is no intersection:

- Stop at the curb and look left, right and left again for traffic.
- Wait until no traffic is coming and begin crossing. Keep looking for traffic until you have finished crossing. Watch any parked cars for signs of movement.



For more detailed Walking School bus information:  
[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking\\_school\\_bus/](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/)