

Walk to School Day Programs

How to Create Walk to School Programs

Step 1: Identify Interest

Talk with parents and neighbors to identify who would like to participate in the Walk to School program

- ♦ Share information about the program
- ♦ Highlight successful programs
- ♦ Find out who is interested in working on the team to start a program
- ♦ Discuss the benefits of a Walk to School program:
 - Increased physical activity
 - Increased safety in the neighborhood (refer to Walkability and Bikeability Checklists in the “Tools” section)
 - Decreased traffic congestion and speed near schools
 - Increased knowledge of safe walking and biking behavior
 - Reduced air pollution
 - More community cohesiveness

Talk to teachers, principals, and other school officials about the program

- ♦ Contact the school principal to talk about the program and involving parents and community members in the program
- ♦ Ask who at the school might be able to help plan the program (physical education teachers, health teachers, etc.)
- ♦ Ask the following questions:
 - Does the school already have a similar program?
 - If so, contact the organizers of that program to find out what they are doing and how they implemented it
 - What are the school transportation rules?

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ Some schools:
 - May require informed consent forms from parents or guardians stating that the school is not responsible for children until they are on school grounds
 - May require children to have signed permission slips before they leave the school with anyone other than their parents or legal guardian
 - Receive funding based on the number of children who ride the bus and therefore may be concerned about supporting a program that may reduce this funding

Contact potential partners

- ♦ Partners can include: Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), health departments, police and/or fire departments, SAFE KIDS Coalitions, community traffic safety programs, faith-based organizations, civic clubs, recreation departments, community centers, senior centers, local businesses, local fitness councils, etc.
- ♦ Ways to recruit partners:
 - Talk to friends, family members, and neighbors
 - Write an article for the school newsletter
 - Circulate flyers
 - Make presentations to local PTAs, walking and biking clubs, senior groups, recreation centers, city councils, and others
- ♦ Gaining support from community organizations will establish credibility for your program and can be essential for overcoming barriers that may develop
 - Schedule a meeting with or write a letter to potential partnering organizations that may have an interest in the program and may want to become involved in assessing, planning, implementing, evaluating, or expanding the program
 - Provide information about the program and explain the problems you would like to see addressed
 - Ask for support as you assess your neighborhood and plan to implement the program
- ♦ Partners are essential to the success of creating sustainable walk to school programs and can help in the following ways:

Walk to School Day Programs

Parents & PTO

- Organize events, contests, and classroom activities
- Publicize the program
- Recruit volunteers

Teachers

- Use classroom assignments to help gather information
- Bring program information into the classroom
- Remind students of the events
- Act as positive role models

Principal

- Ensure that contests or events are compatible with school calendar and school policy
- Set aside time for classroom lessons, assemblies, and bike rodeos

School Administrators & Staff

- Provide a meeting place
- Provide resources (copy machine and fax machine)
- Assist with school publicity
- Provide motivation

High School and College Students

- Participate as Walking School Bus or Bike Train leaders

Neighbors

- Volunteer for events and classroom activities
- Act as crossing guards or Walking School Bus “drivers”

Local Health Department

- A good source of information and support
- Help you develop your program
- Possible source of funding

Police and Fire Departments

- Identify areas of loitering, high crime, unsafe traffic spots, etc.
- Present safety workshops or seminars
- Provide traffic and pedestrian information
- Help control traffic
- Set up crossing guards to and from school

Walk to School Day Programs

- Enforce traffic laws in your community

Local Transportation & Public Works Departments

- Resource for transportation statistics
- Responsible for improving the safety features and walking/biking routes to and from schools
- Possible source of funding

Businesses and community groups

- i.e., Chambers of Commerce, AARP
- Donate food and prizes
- Help publicize the event or program
- Assist with mapping process
- Provide volunteers

Elected officials (city councils, board members, politicians)

- Provide support by participating in events
- Make decisions on street improvements
- Allocate local resources
- Develop supportive policies or legislation

Recreation centers, YMCAs, local fitness councils

- Provide space for meetings or events
- Recruit and provide volunteers
- Provide information on physical activity

Step 2: Informational Meeting

Notify parents, neighbors, school officials, and community members about the meeting

- ♦ Send a Walk to School introduction letter to parents, neighbors, and community members explaining the program and announcing the meeting. Include people who do not have children because the program will affect all neighborhood residents.
- ♦ Post flyers throughout the neighborhood (in libraries, grocery stores, recreation centers, etc.) Get children involved by asking them to design and distribute the flyers.

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ E-mail or call individuals who expressed an interest in participating.
- ♦ Advertise in the school newsletter or community newspaper.
- ♦ Attend your neighborhood association meeting to introduce the Walk to School program, announce the meeting, and recruit volunteers.

Present the Walk to School information at the meeting

- ♦ Assign tasks that need to be completed during the assessment phase (Step 3)
- ♦ Write down the names of people who are willing to volunteer for each task (see Sample Task Assignments Checklist below) and agree on a reasonable target date for completion (not everyone will volunteer, but assume that everyone would like to help – ask what skills they have or offer to teach them how to do a certain task). Some people may not be able to volunteer their time, but they may be interested in providing computers, copy machines, or names of other volunteers.

Pick a time, date, and place for the Walk to School planning meeting

Register your school on the Walk to School Day website
www.walktoschool-usa.org

Walk to School Day Programs

Sample Task Assignments Checklist

	VOLUNTEER	COMPLETION DATE
Distribute <i>Walk to School Survey</i>		
♦ Make copies of the survey	_____	_____
♦ Give to parents (mail, e-mail, in person)	_____	_____
Obtain a map of your community	_____	_____
Complete the <i>Walkability Checklist</i>		
♦ Plan neighborhood walkability assessment	_____	_____
♦ Participate in the assessment	_____	_____
♦ Work with local public works department on the <i>Walkability Checklist</i>	_____	_____
Examine survey and checklist results		
♦ Plot routes to school on the map	_____	_____
♦ Develop a participant roster	_____	_____
♦ Contact volunteers	_____	_____
Prepare results for planning meeting	_____	_____

Step 3: Assessment

Provide a Walk to School Survey to parents

- ♦ Distribute the Walk to School Survey to everyone in the neighborhood. Mail or e-mail it, go door-to-door, and meet with neighbors in person to ask them questions on the survey, or hand it out at the informational meeting (Step 2). To get a sufficient response, specify a deadline for returning the surveys to the designated address (listed on the survey).

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ Results of the Walk to School Survey can be used to:
 - Demonstrate a need for a Walk or Bike to School program
 - Gain information about how to structure your program to meet the needs of each child and family
 - Provide information about barriers to program participation, safety concerns, and the location of families
 - Compare with future survey results (ideally, the survey should be conducted again at the end of the school year to see how many people have changed the way they travel to school since the program began).

Obtain a map of the neighborhood

It is best to work with your county or city planning, public works, or transportation offices to obtain a good community map. In addition to this map, look at maps from parks and recreation offices, local bicycle shops, and auto clubs – each one may tell you something different about your community. When contacting any of these offices, let them know your neighborhood is conducting a survey. Find out if they have staff, such as a pedestrian coordinator, who can help look at the walkability of your neighborhood.

Assess the safety and walkability of the neighborhood using the Walkability and Bikeability Checklists

- ♦ When you assess the walkability
 - Get together with other parents, neighbors, and children and use the Walkability Checklist (refer to “Tools” section) to evaluate the walking and bicycling routes from your neighborhood to the school. Walk with a stroller, wheelchair, skateboard, or wagon to help determine whether the path is accessible for parents with young children and persons who may use wheelchairs or walkers
 - Get young people and older adults to help with the checklist. They may see problems that others miss
 - Invite the media along for your walk. Point out issues related to the safety of your neighborhood

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ Once the Walkability Checklist has been completed, meet with the appropriate person at the local public works department to develop a game plan for making improvements.
 - Walk along the route and point out concerns you identified while completing the checklist.
 - Discuss the problems identified and any others that public works officials noticed.
 - Talk about how to fix these problems
 - Secure a commitment or appropriate timelines for fixing problems.
 - Follow up this meeting with a letter identifying the problems discussed and any corrective actions that were agreed upon.

Use the results of the Walk to School Survey and Walkability/Bikeability Checklists to plan your program

- ♦ Color code the map to indicate:
 - Homes of children who will be participating in the program
 - Safe street crossings, bus stops, bicycle paths, walkways
 - Safe and convenient routes to and from school on the map
 - Dangerous areas (unsafe crossings, gang hangouts, drug-dealing corridors, etc.)
- ♦ Add the number of children who walk or ride a bicycle, school bus, public bus, car, or other vehicle to and from school
- ♦ Develop a participant roster that contains names, ages, grade levels, telephone numbers, and addresses of children in the neighborhood. The ages of the children will help determine the appropriate adult-to-child ratio
- ♦ Contact volunteers who have expressed an interest in helping with the program and ask how they would like to contribute (refer to "Partners" table in Step 1 for ideas on volunteer tasks). Ask them to attend the Walk to School planning meeting to learn more about what needs to be done and how they can help.

Walk to School Day Programs

Step 4: Planning Meeting

At this meeting

- ♦ Present results of the Walkability Checklist and Walk to School Survey
- ♦ Define goals and objectives for your Walk to School program. Sample objectives:
 - Increase the number of children who walk or bike to and from school from 10 to 20.
 - Plant trees along the walking route.
 - Contact the public works department about fixing sidewalks, putting in streetlights, painting crosswalks, etc.
- ♦ Develop an action plan, with priorities and deadlines, for correcting walkability concerns. Use the results of the Walkability Checklist and the discussions with the public works department.
 - Do not try to address every problem at once.
 - Identify those issues that need immediate action and then prioritize the others. You may want to consider making small changes immediately, such as adding traffic signs, crossing guards, and pavement markings, and removing graffiti. Long-term changes, such as getting sidewalks, may require more effort, time, and money and should be prioritized as long-term goals.
 - Make sure deadlines are reasonable for volunteers
- ♦ Assign tasks to volunteers. Write down the names of people willing to volunteer for each task and agree on a reasonable target date for completing the task. Older adults in the community are ideal volunteers for the program. They are usually enthusiastic about participating in something that benefits the community and children, and are more likely to be home during the times that children would be walking to and from school.
- ♦ Send all participants a timeline and organizational chart that includes the tasks, who will complete them, and when they will be completed. Include contact information for all participants on the chart.

Walk to School Day Programs

Sample Task Assignments Checklist

	VOLUNTEER	COMPLETION DATE
♦ Set up a committee for correcting walkability concerns identified in the survey or checklist	_____	_____
♦ Set up a committee to discuss safety precautions	_____	_____
♦ Organize adult leaders' schedule	_____	_____
♦ Organize a practice walk	_____	_____
♦ Plan a kick-off (Step 5)	_____	_____
♦ Evaluate the program (Step 6)	_____	_____

Decide what safety precautions must be taken

Use information from the transportation department, local police department, and local SAFE KIDS Coalition to consider safety precautions for your program. Consider these precautions:

- ♦ Decide on the number of adults needed to supervise the children walking to and from school.
 - A good ratio is one adult per six children.
 - With younger children (ages 4-6), you may want to keep the ratio of one adult per three children.
 - With older children (10 and older), you may want to have a larger ratio.
 - Each situation is different and depends on the children who participate.
 - A very large group may be divided into sections

- ♦ You may want to ask parents to wear specific badges or tags identifying them as the adult leaders for that day's walk

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ Decide how long the group will wait for each child in the morning. Plan what to do if a child is late.
- ♦ Decide how long the group will wait for each child after school. Plan what to do if a child must stay after school or misses the group to walk home. Adult leaders should be advised to never let a child leave school with anyone else unless the parent has provided the leader with instructions to do so.
- ♦ Adult leaders should learn pedestrian safety rules so that they can demonstrate appropriate behavior to the children and be aware of possible dangers when walking. Organizations that may be able to provide pedestrian safety training are your local transportation, police or health departments, and/or SAFE KIDS Coalition.
- ♦ Adult leaders must remember that they are setting an example for the children and should model appropriate safety habits. For example, adult leaders should actually turn their heads from left to right to left instead of just moving their eyes back and forth as experienced walkers often do before crossing.
- ♦ Before the first day, you may want to remind neighborhood residents that the Walk to School program will begin soon.
 - Send them a map of the route the children will be walking to and from school.
 - Ask them to take extra caution as they drive during the morning and afternoon hours when children are walking.
- ♦ It may alleviate some concerns if adult leaders agree to undergo a voluntary background check. Contact your local law enforcement agency on background check rules and procedures.

Organize adult leaders' schedules

Use the information from the Walk to School Survey (refer to “Tools” section for sample survey) to find out which parents want to lead a walk to school. You may suggest that these volunteers meet separately to work out schedules and develop a calendar. The following questions should be discussed:

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ Where should the children wait for pick-up (at the end of their driveway, in the lobby of their apartment building, at a specific bus stop, or at another location)?
- ♦ Where will the children meet at the end of the school day for the walk home (by the front doors, flagpole, bike rack, etc.)?
- ♦ Who will serve as a backup when an adult leader is unable to walk at the last minute, and how will these changes be communicated?
- ♦ What will you do in case of severe weather? Similar programs have continued to operate even if it is raining or snowing, but on days when the weather becomes potentially hazardous, you should reconsider walking. The group should be very specific about what they define as severe weather.
- ♦ How long will the group wait for a participant before continuing the walk?
- ♦ What is inappropriate behavior, and what are the consequences?

Send out parental consent forms

Check with the school to find out specific rules on parental consent policies. By signing the form, parents are simply giving permission for their child to participate in the Walk to School program.

Conduct a practice walk to school

Children, parents, and adult leaders should do a practice walk to and from school. You may decide to schedule the practice walk on a weekend or evening so all parents and children can participate. This practice walk will:

- ♦ Determine how long it takes to get to and from school
- ♦ Identify any problems that might occur
- ♦ Allow for problems to be corrected before the kick-off day

Walk to School Day Programs

- ♦ Enable parents to show their children what behavior they expect during the walk
- ♦ Provide an opportunity for children, parents, and adult leaders to meet each other

Step 5: Implementation

Sponsor a kick-off event (see Walk to School Day, Section Two for more information)

- ♦ A kick-off event is a great way to get people excited about the program. Some suggestions for the kick-off include:
- ♦ Inviting members of the community, such as local law enforcement officers or local celebrities, to participate in the event and walk to school with your group.
- ♦ Providing breakfast foods.
- ♦ Giving away educational materials, reflector badges, etc.
- ♦ Sending out a press release (refer to “Media” section for sample press releases).
- ♦ Inviting members of the media to be present at the kick-off to prepare a story on your program – this coverage may encourage others to begin programs in their neighborhoods.

Refer to Walk to School Day information in the “Introduction” section for other ideas on planning a kick-off event

International Walk your Child to School Day or Week is a great time to kick off your program! For more information, visit www.walktoschool-usa.org.

Walk to School Day Programs

Step 6: Evaluation

Evaluate your program at the end of each term

- ♦ Ask students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and other individuals involved with Walk to School what they think of the program.
 - What did they like?
 - What did they think could be done better?
 - How would they improve the program?
- ♦ Collect success stories and use them in a newsletter or a follow-up letter to send to all partners (transportation department, health department, schools, etc.)
- ♦ Complete the Walk to School Evaluation (refer to “Tools” section for sample evaluation). Use this evaluation to see how your program is working and how to improve it.

Monitor the progress of your program

- ♦ Monitor and address participants’ concerns and revise walking routes, program objectives, and strategies as necessary. This is important to:
 - Confirm that the program is meeting its goals and objectives
 - Identify successes and barriers
 - Generate additional support for the program
 - Help others who are planning a Walk to School program
- ♦ Keep the school and partnering organizations informed about participation, barriers, and improvements to the program

Step 7: Future Planning

Keep your Walk to School program going

Plan for the next school term’s program, as children may be moving into other schools. New parent organizers and leaders will be needed. When

Walk to School Day Programs

the new school term begins, create a feeling of excitement among the walkers by planning a special outing or doing something on the first day of school.

After the program is under way, it is important to keep morale high and motivate participants, especially as the weather becomes colder and the days shorter. To keep the neighborhood excited about the program, it might help to include daily activities or weekly and monthly contests. You can also distribute informational letters about the program at a parent-teacher conference or ask the editor of your child's school newsletter to include an article about the program.

Local organizations may want to be a part of the program. For example, check with your local health department, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, or the American Lung Association. These organizations may be willing to sponsor, provide helpful information, or acknowledge volunteers for participation.

AARP: www.aarp.org

American Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.org

American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org

American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org

American Lung Association: www.lungusa.org

Look for ways to expand your Walk to School program

- ♦ Promote the success of the program to other schools, neighborhoods, and communities by:
 - Including articles in the school newsletter or community newspaper
 - Posting your own newsletter at the school
 - Presenting your program at the next PTA meeting
 - Asking a local TV news station to do a story
 - Writing an editorial for your local paper

- ♦ Conduct an informal statewide travel-to-school survey to find out how children get to and from school. You may be surprised at how many children are driven to school and how infrequently they walk. This survey may get your school interested in expanding the program.
 - Request that teachers ask their students to raise their hands to indicate how they got to school each morning for a week.

Walk to School Day Programs

- Have teachers record the responses and take the results to their administrators.
- ♦ Help other neighborhoods start the program. You can help by guiding them through the specific steps that were difficult, by sharing ideas of things that worked, and by explaining how you overcame barriers. Remember that every neighborhood, school, or community is different and will have varying barriers and successes.

Plan the program on a larger scale

You may want to plan a program for the entire school system or district. Many of the steps for organizing a larger scale program are similar to the neighborhood program, but there are a few other considerations:

- ♦ Present the program to your school's PTA.
- ♦ Once you have established interest, form a committee that includes representatives from all participating groups, such as parents, crossing guards, the school principal, physical education teachers, students, and the transportation committee.
- ♦ Include all students in the program – not just the ones who live within walking distance of the school. Everyone can gain from the message of a Walk to School program and participate in different ways. Be creative: have school-wide contests for walking the most in a week or month or include pedestrian safety, air pollution reduction, physical activity, and related topics in the school curriculum.
 - Use pedometers to measure steps.
 - Study the health benefits of daily physical activity.
 - Learn warm-up and stretches appropriate for walking.
 - Keep physical activity logs of walking time or steps.
- ♦ Have each neighborhood come up with a name for its group that distinguishes it from other programs. Design signs for each group that will help young children identify the group at the end of the school day such as Walk to School Park Hill or Walk to School Bromwell.

Walk to School Day Programs

Take steps to secure a walkable community and establish long-term goals

Once community members experience the neighborhood as pedestrians, they will pull together to change the streets to accommodate children and adults who want to walk or bike. Changing the structure and lifestyle of your community can be difficult. It will be necessary to write letters to city council members, county commissioners, and other elected officials. Examples of more extensive changes that can be made include changing the dimensions of an intersection in order to reduce traffic speeds, putting in more sidewalks, and altering the structure and flow of traffic. Work with your local public works department to implement traffic-calming measures. Many organizations offer materials and support to promote the design of healthy, walkable communities. The following is a list of resources:

Walk to School Resources

International Walk to School Day
www.walktoschool-usa.org

Safe Routes to School Clearinghouse
www.saferoutesinfo.org/

CO Dept. of Transportation
www.dot.state.co.us/bikeped/SafeRoutesToSchool.htm

Kids Walk to School:
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/index.htm

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:
www.nhtsa.dot.gov

National SAFE KIDS Campaign:
www.safekids.org