

Tips to help kids travel independently

Walking, bicycling and riding the bus (which incorporates walking) puts us in environments rich in sights and sounds. We feel the breeze and hear and smell the world around us. We also impact the world around us, creating cleaner, healthier and more vibrant public spaces.

Use the information here to teach your child these important skills and to know when they're ready to make short trips on their own.



Help Your Child Become an Independent Traveler

1. Teach your child to walk and bicycle safely with Smart Trips maps and brochures. **Confident City Cycling** and the **Smart Trips Map of Bellingham and Whatcom County** are available at WhatcomSmartTrips.org. Call 360-756-8747 for paper copies.
2. Learn how to teach good bicycle skills in a **Smart Trips Bike Buddy** session with your child.
3. Model appropriate traffic safety practices when you are walking, bicycling or driving. Talk with your child about the safety rules for each situation that you encounter.
4. Teach your child to ride WTA buses. Call 360-676-RIDE for assistance with routes and schedules. Learn how to ride the bus together by joining a **Smart Trips Guided Bus Trip**. **Get There by Bus** is available online or by calling 360-756-TRIP.
5. Walk, bike or ride the bus with your child to school, play dates, afterschool lessons and sports practice. Invite their friends to join you.
6. When they're ready, have your children lead you on trips, demonstrating safety skills.
7. Choose to walk, bicycle and ride the bus for your own travel needs. You will be communicating that these are important forms of transportation.
8. Allow your child to make independent trips when you feel they are ready.



Independent travel provides important benefits for children

- **Healthy physical activity** becomes part of everyday life.
- Children are more alert, eager and **ready to learn**.
- Being outside is a **sensory experience** where imagination, adventure and creativity are found.
- **Familiarity with their neighborhood** helps children be resilient and adaptable.
- Independent travel teaches **responsible decision-making**, builds self-esteem and confidence.



Understanding How Children See Traffic

As a parent you are the best person to know when your child has developed the skills and judgment needed for independent travel. For young children, it's important to understand their limitations in traffic situations.

Specifically, young children:

- Have a field of vision one third narrower than adults have
- Cannot readily tell from which direction a sound is coming
- Have a limited sense of danger and expect others to look out for them
- Overestimate their knowledge and physical strength
- Cannot easily judge a car's speed and distance
- Do not understand many traffic situations
- Assume that if they can see a car, the driver can see them



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