

Talking Points: Addressing Parents

As a law enforcement officer, you are likely to have many invitations to make a brief presentation regarding pedestrian and bicycle safety in a school setting or at a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) meeting. The following is not a speech, but rather ten to fifteen minutes of talking points you can use as a guide to make sure you cover key messages. With more time and depending on the particular circumstances at the school you are visiting, you can elaborate on any of the issues below.

Overall message: Start and end with an upbeat message. The points are mostly about safety, but you should emphasize that walking and bicycling are good for the health of children and is something that your department supports.

- Walking and bicycling are important to children's health; it also helps children become more independent and confident as they grow older. Walking and bicycling are something our department supports!
- Before encouraging walking and bicycling to school, safety issues must be examined and addressed collectively as a community.
- Children younger than 10 years old should walk with a responsible parent, guardian or a responsible older sibling. Research shows that children younger than 10 years old lack the experience, maturity and adequate brain development to make safe decisions around traffic, including crossing roads.
- Parents need to recognize each child's level of ability to walk and bike safely. Parents need to determine if a child is responsible enough to walk or bicycle to school.
- Safety messages to children need to be repeated over and over so behaviors become habits. Safety messages need to be consistent among all care providers including parents, grandparents, teachers, and law enforcement officers. Messages include:
 - Cross the road where the crossing guard is located.
 - Follow pedestrian signs and signals that indicate when to *walk* or *not walk*.
 - Cross only in a crosswalk, and

- Wear materials and equipment to be more visible to drivers. Materials can include bright clothing during the day and reflective gear and lights in low light conditions and at night. Pedestrians should use flashlights and bicyclists must use a white front light on their bicycle.
- Pedestrians and bicyclists need to pay attention, using both their eyes and ears at all times.
 - Pedestrians and bicyclists, like motorists, need to be free of distractions, such as electronic devices (those used for music, phones, games, texting).
 - Pedestrians and bicyclists can't hear traffic when they are listening to loud music or talking on their phone and are not able to pay attention to their surroundings (people, obstacles, or traffic) as well as they should.
 - Many children have been hit by cars because they simply didn't hear them coming and were "in their own world."
- Bicycle helmets are absolutely essential every ride and are not just for children; everyone should wear a helmet! A bicycle helmet is the single most effective piece of equipment to protect the head and brain from injury in the event of a crash.
 - The average age for bicyclists being killed is around 41 years old and the average age for bicyclists injured is 31. Two-thirds of bicyclists' deaths are from traumatic brain injury. Between 45 to 88 percent of brain injuries due to bicycle crashes, can be prevented by wearing a helmet.
 - Helmets should be worn by children using bicycles, scooters and skateboards.
 - Only wear a helmet suitable for bicycling. Multi-use helmets are becoming increasingly popular, especially among children. These helmets can be worn if they are labeled as suitable for bicycling.
 - A brain injury can mean a lifelong impact on the quality of life for a child and the family and an enormous financial burden.

- Avoid the most common mistakes seen with helmet use:
 - Wear a helmet every ride, every time.
 - Wear a helmet properly.
- To fit and properly wear a bicycle helmet, follow the **2/2/2 rule**:
 - Fit the helmet flat on your head, no more than 2 finger widths above the eyebrow to protect the forehead.
 - Adjust the straps so they form a "V" around each ear.
 - Fasten and tighten the straps. No more than two fingers should fit between the chin and chin strap.
- If you or your child falls and the helmet is hit, purchase a new helmet. A damaged helmet, even if you can't see it, won't protect your head like it should.
- Wearing a bicycle helmet is the law (cite the law in the jurisdiction if this applies).
- Parents, school employees and other adults that spend time with children must model appropriate behavior when it comes to pedestrian and bicycle safety behavior. Your child and the children around you notice when the actions of their parents and other adults don't match what that are being asked to do.
 - Model safe behavior when you are a pedestrian.
 - Model safe behavior when you are a pedestrian.
 - Model safe behavior when you are a driver around pedestrians and bicyclists.
- As drivers, we all have a big responsibility as well. Please don't speed – this is not just an issue right in front of the school, but on the streets in the surrounding areas. Pledge to drive the speed limit in your neighborhood ALL the time.
- Law enforcement officers worry about a child getting hit by a car as much as parents do. Having to tell a parent their child has been hit or killed is one of the worst days

of our lives. Remember that children can be unpredictable in and around traffic; motorists must always drive with caution, especially around children.

- A drivers speed matters. The chances of a pedestrian surviving a motor vehicle crash is directly related to the speed of the car. The slower the speed of the car, the greater the chance of survival. (Killing People and Saving Lives, UK Department of Transportation, 1987. This is why speed limits are low in school zones and on neighborhood streets.
 - If you are worried about speeding in your neighborhood, call us; we will see if we can conduct some speed enforcement activities.
- Walking and bicycling are daily life activities that children need to learn how to do safely, and that can also improve their health. We encourage you to help them get to and from school safely!

A few additional points to make to parents in areas with crime issues:

- Be proactive with your child; please talk with your child about how to handle situations when they are approached by bullies, strangers, and other unsavory characters. Contact the police department if you need additional guidance.
- Take an active part in determining the safer routes for your children to take when walking or bicycling to and from school. Neighborhood streets or those with less traffic are best along with more prominent routes rather than back alleys. They may need to avoid certain streets with abandoned properties. Contact the police department if you need additional guidance.
- Make sure your children walk with a friend and always use the route you've agreed on. It may also help your peace of mind to check in with them at a pre-arranged time every day.
- It is important for children to stay focused and be aware of their surroundings while walking and bicycling. While we don't want to scare them, remind your children to frequently scan the area and be aware of anything that may be suspicious. We want our children to be safe and develop healthy walking and bicycling habits.