

## Back to School Safety

When parents talk about school safety these days, they're usually referring to the surge in violence at schools. But research shows that school-age children are actually nine times more likely to sustain an unintentional injury than to be the victim of violence while at school. In fact, an estimated 2.2 million children ages 14 and under are injured in school-related accidents each year, but accidents can be prevented if parents are on the lookout for potential hazards. Here are some safety tips while traveling to and from school:

### Walking or Biking:

- Small children are impulsive and less cautious around traffic. Consider whether your child is ready to walk or bike to school without adult supervision.
- Walk with them the first week to make sure they know the route and can do it safely. Tell him or her to stay away from parks, vacant lots, fields, and other places where there aren't many people.
- Bright colored clothing will make your child more visible to drivers.
- In neighborhoods with higher traffic levels, consider starting a "walking school bus," in which an adult accompanies a group of neighborhood children walking to school or be sure your child walks to and from school with a relative, friend, or neighbor.
- Plan a walk/bike route to school or to the bus stop. Choose the most direct way with the fewest street crossings and, if possible, with intersections that have crossing guards.
- Never to talk to, or accept rides or gifts from strangers. Remind your children, a stranger is anyone you don't know well or don't trust.
- Obey traffic signals, signs, and traffic officers and be extra careful in bad weather.
- Ride on the right, in the same direction as auto traffic and use appropriate hand signals.
- A helmet can reduce the risk of head injuries by up to 85 percent. Make sure your child wears a helmet that meets safety standards. Sturdy shoes, kneepads, and elbow pads are also recommended.

### Cars-riders:

- All passengers should wear seat belts and/or height and weight-appropriate car safety seat or booster seat.
- Your child should ride in a car safety seat with a five-point harness as long as possible and then ride in a belt-positioning booster seat.
- Your child is ready for a booster seat when they have reached the top weight or height allowed for their seat, their shoulders are above the top harness slots, or their ears have reached the top of the seat.
- Your child should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's seat belt fits properly (usually when the child reaches 4' 9" in height and is between 8 to 12 years of age). This means that the child is tall enough to sit against the

vehicle seat back with their legs bent at the knees and feet hanging down. The shoulder belt should lie across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat; the lap belt is low and snug across the hips, and not the stomach.

- All children under 13 years of age should ride in the rear seat of vehicles.
- Deliver and pick children up as close to the school as possible. Don't leave until they are in the schoolyard or building.
- For teen drivers, require seat belt use, limit the number of teen passengers, and do not allow eating, drinking, cell phone conversations, or texting to prevent driver distraction.

#### Bus:

- Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb.
- Remind your children to stay seated at all times and keep their hands and arms inside the bus while riding.
- Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing the street.
- Always remain in clear view of the bus driver.
- Line up facing the bus, not along side it.
- When exiting the bus, children should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop, exit from the front using the handrail and cross the street at least 10 feet (or 10 giant steps) in front of the bus.
- Do not to bend down in front of the bus to tie shoes or pick up objects around or under the bus.
- Your children should know their home phone number and address, your work number, the number of another trusted adult, and how to call 911 for emergencies.
- Avoid drawstrings around the neck of jackets and sweatshirts. Drawstrings at the waist or bottom of jackets should extend no more than three inches long to prevent catching in car and school bus doors or getting caught on playground equipment.
- Teach children proper behavior while walking in or by buses: no pushing, shoving, or crowding.

During the first few days of school, firefighters in Bonita Springs will be at each school zone with banners reminding drivers to drive slowly and cautiously when school is back in session. For more information on Back to School safety contact 239-949-6200.