

ACTIVE TRAVEL NEWSLETTER INSERTS

Here are a range of short inserts you can add into your school newsletter to promote and encourage active travel.

GETTING YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL SAFELY

All parents want their children to arrive at school safely and on time and most believe the best way is to drive them right to the school gate. This in fact creates hazards for children, as cars travel the street outside the school looking for parking, moving in and out of parking spaces. Just three decades ago, 70 per cent of children walked or rode to school – now only 30 per cent do. Walking, riding, scooting or skating to and from school has so many benefits! With less traffic and parking congestion, our school becomes a much safer place. Children are happier and healthier when they use active travel - they are meeting their 60 minutes of physical activity per day, exploring and getting to know their neighborhood, and have fun with friends! Consider using active travel, and help our school community be a safe and healthy place.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: THERE ARE MORE UNSAFE STRANGERS AROUND THE STREETS THESE DAYS

There is no evidence to show that streets are any less safe in terms of 'stranger danger' than they were 30 years ago (Tim Gill: No Fear – Growing up in a risk averse society; 2007). Many dangers may be exaggerated due to ongoing media reports of rare cases of child abduction. Having more people walking the streets in fact reduces the risk of 'stranger danger' – more eyes on the street make it safer for everyone, and breaks down the 'stranger' barrier. If you still feel worried about your child travelling to school on their own, try parking a small distance from the school (500m – 1.5km) and walk or ride the remainder of the way with them, or take it in turns with other parents to lead a walking school bus from a 'drop off point' near the school.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: IT'S SAFER ALL ROUND IF I DRIVE MY CHILDREN TO SCHOOL

It's not! The greater the number of cars driving past the school, stopping to look for a park, reversing into and out of bays, doing u-turns etc, the less safe the school perimeters. In Victoria, 65 per cent of accidents involving children occur before and after school while they and others are being picked up and dropped off by parents. Studies show that more walkers on the streets make drivers slow down, and so kids walking to school helps to reduce the number and speed of cars. Consider using active travel, and help our school be a safe and healthy place.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: IT'S TOO FAR FOR MY CHILD TO WALK TO SCHOOL

Do you know how far you live from school? – take a look at a Greater Geelong Active Travel map (there are 3 in the series and can be picked up from any Customer Service Centre) and work out the distance. From the Walking School Bus we know that younger primary school children can walk 250m in five minutes, 500m in ten minutes (the time it takes to get kids in the car and drive them) 750m in 15 minutes and 1km in 20 minutes, and some will happily walk 1.5km in 30 minutes. If you live further than 1.5km, or if you are on the way to work how about just driving part of the way and parking a small distance from the school (500m – 1.5km) and walk or ride the remainder of the way with them, or take it in turns with other parents to lead a walking school bus from a 'drop off point' near the school.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: MY CHILD WOULD BE TOO TIRED IN CLASS THEY WALKED

In a UK survey of 100 teachers, 87 per cent said that children who walk to school seem more awake when getting to class, and 60 per cent said that children are more ready to start class work. It is well known that physical activity creates mental energy and the chance to talk with friends on the way – so they are less likely to do so in class. A Brisbane study of children walking to school supports this research, with one child saying "Every time I walk to school I get everything right" (Anon, Age 7). Walking home also allows children some 'head space' between one activity and another. Try helping your child to use active travel to school, and see if you notice an improvement in their concentration.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: I SAVE TIME DRIVING MY CHILDREN TO AND FROM SCHOOL

By the time you've stopped at lights and signs, driven through 40km/h zones, gone around the block looking for a park...your child could have walked to school, and had a far nicer time than in the back seat of the car! The time taken for short car trips increases as more children are driven everywhere and traffic becomes worse. The time spent looking for and sitting in a car park could instead be spent walking your child home: "I sit there for twenty-five minutes out the front, because if you don't you miss out on parking spot". We've heard parents say too that they get 15 minutes or so to themselves in the morning before going to work when their children walk - they miss out on this when driving their children.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: I WOULD HAVE TO GET MY CHILD OUT OF BED MUCH EARLIER IF THEY WALKED

Many children will get ready on time if they know they will see their friends on the way to school. We know of children who were once difficult to get out of bed until they joined a Walking School Bus, and now get their clothes and bags ready the night before so they won't miss walking with their friends. Organisation is the key – making lunch the night before can help the household move on time in the morning.

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: MY CHILD DOESN'T LIKE WALKING

Are you sure you really know this? In a Melbourne survey, over 60 per cent of children said they wanted to walk to school because they get to chat with friends and see things. "Last Monday I walked back from school and I think it's lovely because you see stuff without just zooming past" (Chris, age 10). Have your children walked with their friends? Or have you walked home with them? Try it! Many parents say that bonding increases when they walk with their children, and they chat in a way that doesn't happen in the car, or when children are at home watching television. They say it is quality time. Many children do not enjoy being a passenger: "When I walk to school I don't have to sit in the back seat with my annoying brother"

ACTIVE TRAVEL MYTH: DRIVING MY CHILDREN TO SCHOOL SHOWS I'M A 'GOOD' PARENT

Many parents feel trapped into driving their children to school because all the other parents are doing so, thinking that it is safer than walking. However they are actually increasing the risk of a crash involving children who walk. Social researchers ask whether we can change this belief, so that a 'good' parent is one who allows their child to experience the joy and wonder that comes with walking to school.

THE "BUBBLEWRAP GENERATION"

This name for children today (Karen Malone, University of Wollongong) refers to their overprotection and the restricting of their movements. These children lack skills in working out hazards in their environment, putting them at greater risk of becoming a target for the dangers that parents want to protect them from. Travelling without adults helps children develop a sense of control, independence and confidence in making their way around their own world. "Letting go" is challenging but can be managed in stages, when you believe you've taught your child the skills they need. One local parent says about her daughter being allowed to cycle to school: "she is happier that I believe in her... she sees that I believe in her".

HOW TO LET YOUR CHILDREN WALK AND RIDE TO SCHOOL SAFELY

1. Talk with other parents in your street/ neighbourhood about taking turns to walk with each other's young children to/from school.
2. Develop buddy groups of older children who can walk together without adults.
3. Drive just part of the way to school and drop your children 500m away so they can walk the remainder - or walk with them that distance.
4. Pack bags and make lunches the night before, to maximise walking time in the morning.
5. Teach your children road safety and navigation skills by walking with them around the neighbourhood – practice on weekends when roads are quieter and you have more time.

If we have more children walking and cycling to school than being driven as we had just a couple of decades ago, the streets will be safer for those children and the community in general.

HELP YOUR CHILD MEET THEIR RECOMMENDED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS THROUGH ACTIVE TRAVEL!

Did you know that it is recommended that children between the ages of 5-12 get at least **60 MINUTES** of physical activity per day? Help your children stay healthy by helping them to walk or ride to and from school. If you feel it is too far, drive part of the way so your child can walk, ride, scoot or skate the remainder. If your child is too young to walk on their own, try parking and walking or riding with them! This will also help you meet your recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

ACTIVE TRAVEL IS POSSIBLE EVEN IF YOU LIVE TOO FAR FROM THE SCHOOL

Active travel is all about using physical activity to get around. Many of us live at a distance from the school, and think that it is way too far for our children to use active travel. There is a solution... Try dropping your child small distances away from the school (500m - 1.5km) so they can walk, ride, scoot or skate the remainder of the way. If your child is younger, or you don't want your child to walk alone, organise a 'drop off point' with other parents. There are many ways to make active travel work for you and your children.

HELP US CREATE A SAFER SCHOOL BY USING ACTIVE TRAVEL

Help protect your children and the school community by encouraging them to use active travel. Studies show that more walkers on the streets make drivers slow down. If most of our school community walks or rides their bikes to and from the school, there would be less cars parking and moving around the school. For those of us that live a distance from the school and feel that it is way too far for our children to use active travel, there is a solution... Try dropping your child small distances away from the school (500m - 1.5km) so they can walk, ride, scoot or skate the remainder of the way. If your child is younger, or you don't want your child to walk alone, organise a 'drop off point' or a buddy system with other parents. There are many ways to make active travel work for you and your children.

CHILDREN ARE HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER WHEN THEY TRAVEL TO SCHOOL ACTIVELY

Did you know it has been proven that physical activity helps to reduce the risk of obesity, reduce chronic diseases and also improves mental health and wellbeing? The research shows that students who walk, ride, scoot and skate to and from school are often happier, healthier and more socially connected than children who are driven to school. If your child is not old enough to walk or ride to school on their own yet, try parking the car a little distance from the school (500m – 1.5km) and walk or ride the remainder of the way. Walking and riding with your children will also help you reach your recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day which is great for your health and wellbeing.

ACTIVE TRAVEL WILL HELP YOUR CHILDREN BUILD VERY IMPORTANT ROAD AND SAFETY SKILLS

Children do not just 'get' road sense automatically, and they can't get it from the back seat of a car. The only way for them to build important road and safety skill is to practice under supervision when they are younger. Walking or riding with your child to school, even just a couple of days a week, will help them learn these necessary skills. When your child is older and starts to walk and ride in the community on their own, you will also feel more confident, because you have seen them practise their road and safety skills. Also, many people do not realise it is legal for children under 12 and adults riding with them can ride on the footpath, so do not feel you or your children have to practise on the road.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ACTIVE TRAVEL CAN HELP YOUR CHILD FOCUS IN SCHOOL?

Research is showing that children who participate in physical activity before school are more alert and ready to learn than in-active children. Actively travelling to school using means such as walking or riding will help your child to be more active in the morning and concentrate better in class.

WALK TO SCHOOL MONTH

[Your school name] is excited to be taking part in VicHealth's Walk to School from {insert date}

Walk to School encourages primary school students to walk to and from school every day in {insert month} to highlight the ways walking improves children's health and wellbeing. Walking to school is a great way to help kids achieve the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

We'll be encouraging families and students to walk to and from school as often as possible during {insert month} to help students learn healthy habits for life. Teachers will use classroom calendars to record each time student's walk to and from school. VicHealth offers some great prizes to schools with high participation, and runs fun walking themed competitions for students throughout {insert month}

We'll be providing parents with an 'Information sheet for parents and guardians' with all the information you'll need about Walk to School. You can also visit the Walk to School website for more information:

www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au

Not sure how to get started?

There are lots of ways families can get involved. You might like to:

- walk with your child to and from school and enjoy the chance to talk, help your child learn road safety skills, and get to know the local neighbourhood together
- arrange for your child to walk with other families or friends, giving them time to socialise and share their journey
- drive part of the way to school and walk the rest, particularly if you live a long way from school, or have limited time
- mix it up – if your child enjoys riding their bike or scooter, that's great too!