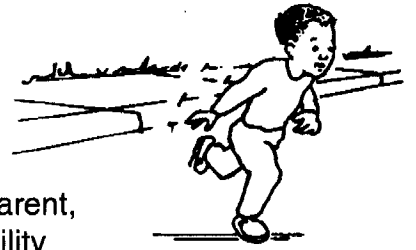


# SHOULD YOUR CHILD CROSS STREETS ALONE?



Your child is starting to grow up, starting to assume responsibility. As a parent, you have to be the judge as to when they are ready to assume responsibility for different things. When it comes to traffic and crossing streets, there are some things you should consider about your child's ability to deal with traffic.

## **CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT FACTORS**

**VISION** - Their eyes are not fully developed

1. Children lack peripheral vision (the ability to see off to the side) until about age 7. They see 1/3 less than you.
2. Children have difficulty judging depth of field (which object is closer) which means they cannot judge speed or distance.
3. Young children have difficulty telling whether a car is coming or going, moving or standing still. (Did you ever see a child waiting for a car that was 2 blocks away?)

**HEARING** - Children are learning

1. Children are learning to pick out sounds and place meanings or risks on them.
2. Children usually pick out the sound that interests them the most (friends voices versus roaring engines).
3. Children are learning to recognize specific sounds and separate sounds presented among many sounds.
4. They are learning to assess sound distance, amplitude, pitch and location.

## **CHILD SIZE**

1. At their height, they may only see 1 car where you see 3.
2. They are easily hidden by parked cars and can't see over them.

## **CHILDREN'S THOUGHT PROCESSES AND KNOWLEDGE**

1. They have no concept of "danger". It's a pretty safe world you've given them. They have to learn something can hurt them before it happens.
2. Studies show children do not understand death until about age 9. They won't get hurt or die. Life just goes on.
3. Children's worlds of reality and pretend mix. They can give life-like qualities to things that are not alive, like cars. Friendly things, aren't they?
4. Cars take them to friendly places, like grandma's and the ice cream parlor. They are comfortable, warm and dry.
5. Children's life experiences say that cars are friends and so are drivers. After all, all adults they know take care of them and adults drive cars. Adults wouldn't hurt them!
6. Studies show that a child can believe everything on TV to be real, including cartoons? If the Coyote can be flattened by a truck while chasing the Roadrunner and then can get up and be okay again, why can't they?
7. Children are impatient and impulsive.
8. Children "center" on things, think of only one at a time. (Did you ever try to get their attention while they watch TV?) If they want to see something across the street, their thoughts are centered on it, not traffic.
9. They have little knowledge or understanding of the complex traffic system, rules and abilities of a driver to see them and stop.



## **CHILD ACCIDENTS**

1. Most are mid-block, many near parked cars, and most involve boys.
2. Kids running into the sides of cars are fairly common. "Centering"?
3. Ages 5, 6 and 7 have the greatest involvement. Lack of development?
4. 4 out of 5 accidents involve running action. Impulsive?
5. Accidents to children under age 10 peak in spring.

## **SHOULD YOUR CHILD CROSS STREETS ALONE ?**

1. If your child is an average 4 or 5 year old, no. He doesn't have the physical ability to gather information to make a safe judgement.
2. But my child is bright, knows the alphabet and can count from 1 to 20! (It's called rote learning and probably came from watching Sesame Street over and over. The child made no conscious decision to learn it).
3. Crossing streets takes gathering information and decision making. Each time you get to a curb, the situation is different.
4. Without adequate vision, hearing, knowledge and thought processes, kids are poor decision makers and poor pedestrians. Therefore, children up to age 7 get involved in more accidents than older children.

## **WHAT CAN WE DO ?**

1. Take your child for a walk and let them make all the decisions as to when it is safe so that you learn what they are capable of. Ask questions of them like how far away? Which one's closer? Moving faster? Watch where they are looking for traffic.
2. Check their skills against what we have predicated them to be.
3. Begin giving your child practice crossing by stepping at the curb and looking. Exaggerate your head movement and they will imitate it. Teach them what to look for and where to look.
4. Be patient and set a good example anytime they are along. They learn by imitation and will do what you do.
5. Don't let your child go too early. They're not miniature adults. They need to hear the same thing often. Reinforce. Reinforce. Reinforce. Especially in spring ?
6. Explore other options rather than letting your child walk to school or to the school bus alone. Options might include an older student, neighbor, baby-sitter, aunt, uncle or grandparent, etc.
7. Don't let your children cross streets unsupervised when they're too young!

## **CITY OF MILWAUKEE POLICE DEPARTMENT**



**MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL  
IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
MILWAUKEE SAFETY COMMISSION**

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