

Talk the Talk, Then Walk the Walk

For many children, going back to school is a time of greater independence and responsibility — whether that means traveling to school on their own for the first time or eating lunch outside of school. We have collected some important safety tips that parents may want to cover with children who will be experiencing these milestones of independence this fall.

- **Plan the Route.** Plan a walking route to school, bus stop or subway station. Select a direct route with as few street crossings as possible. Parents should practice the route with their child until he or she feels comfortable traveling alone.
- **Know Traffic Safety.** Know and obey all traffic signals and signs. Always leave plenty of time to cross the street and look left, then right, then left again before crossing.
- **Travel Together.** Travel with a friend, neighbor or sibling.
- **Avoid the Road Less Traveled.** Stay in well-populated areas (commercial avenues, streets with doorman buildings) and avoid shortcuts, vacant lots, construction sites and quiet park areas and walkways. After dark, stay in well-lighted areas.
- **Know how to get help.** In addition to home information, know your parents' work and cell phone numbers and school number. Know how, when, and why to dial 911. Carry change for a telephone call, a phone card or a cell phone.
- **Be Alert.** Look around you occasionally to see who is there. Appear confident. If you are on a lonely street, walk and act as if you are going to meet someone. Be attuned to parked, idling cars, especially if you can't see in the windows.

- **Stay Alert.** Remember that talking on your cell-phone, sending messages, web surfing and listening to music etc. on handheld devices will make it more difficult for you to be aware of your surroundings.
- **Don't Show Off.** Avoid wearing flashy jewelry or holding money out in the open, which can invite theft and assault. Thefts and violent crimes involving cell phones, iPods and similar hand held devices are on the rise — keep them secure and, preferably, out of sight.

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- **Have a Back-Up Plan.** Know what to do if something goes wrong with your travel route, for example you miss your bus stop or there are unforeseen road or subway closings. If you should get lost or separated, ask for help from a police officer or security guard. Choose a busy location to wait, so that you are not alone until your friends find you.
- **Be aware that there are some people who will try to take advantage of you.** They might try to win you over by offering you money, candy, or a gift, or ask you to help them find a lost dog. Say No! You do not need to answer any questions directed to you from an adult that you do not know — simply walk away. Always let your parents or school authorities know about anyone who tries to accost you bodily, or lure you away.
- **Hanging out can be dangerous.** Any group loitering on a street corner may become a target for troublemakers. Gather with your friends in supervised areas, at school, or at your home.

- **Know Subway Safety.** When waiting for a train, stand well back on the platform and avoid crowds near the edge of the platform. Never jump on the tracks. Avoid empty cars and never move between cars while the train is moving. If you wish to change cars, wait until the next stop. If possible, sit in the middle of the train near the conductor. If the train becomes stuck, stay in the car and wait for instructions.
- **Know Bus Safety.** Stand back from the curb and wait until the bus comes to a full stop before you approach it. If possible, stay at the front of the bus near the driver. As you exit, go directly to the curb and wait until the bus has left before you attempt to cross the street. If waiting for buses after dark, stay in well-lit areas where you can be seen; if possible, wait in groups.
- **Hail Cabs Safely.** Stay on the curb. While looking for a taxi, remain alert to the oncoming traffic and to all traffic signals. Always enter and exit on the curb side. Cab partitions can cause serious injury in the event the cab stops short — wear your seatbelt.
- **“Let it Go.”** If approached by a mugger, do not fight or argue. A mugger may be on drugs and/or irrational.
- **Safe Havens.** If anyone suspicious is following you, seek help from the nearest police officer, store or restaurant. Look for safe haven stickers on store windows. After dark, call a car service to take you home, even for a few blocks. Ask the driver to wait until you are safely inside the building.
- **Have a Family Emergency Plan.** Discuss an emergency plan with your family. Information that you should have with you includes a neighborhood meeting address and phone number in case you cannot make it home. It is also a good idea to have a friend or relative outside New York City (for example, in another state) as an additional contact; keep that number with you as well. For information on city services (for example, bus or subway) during an emergency, dial 311. Do not dial 311 for 911 emergencies.
- **Your personal safety is important.** Don't be embarrassed at being afraid. Confide in your parents, guardians, school authorities and police — who all want to help you. ●

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