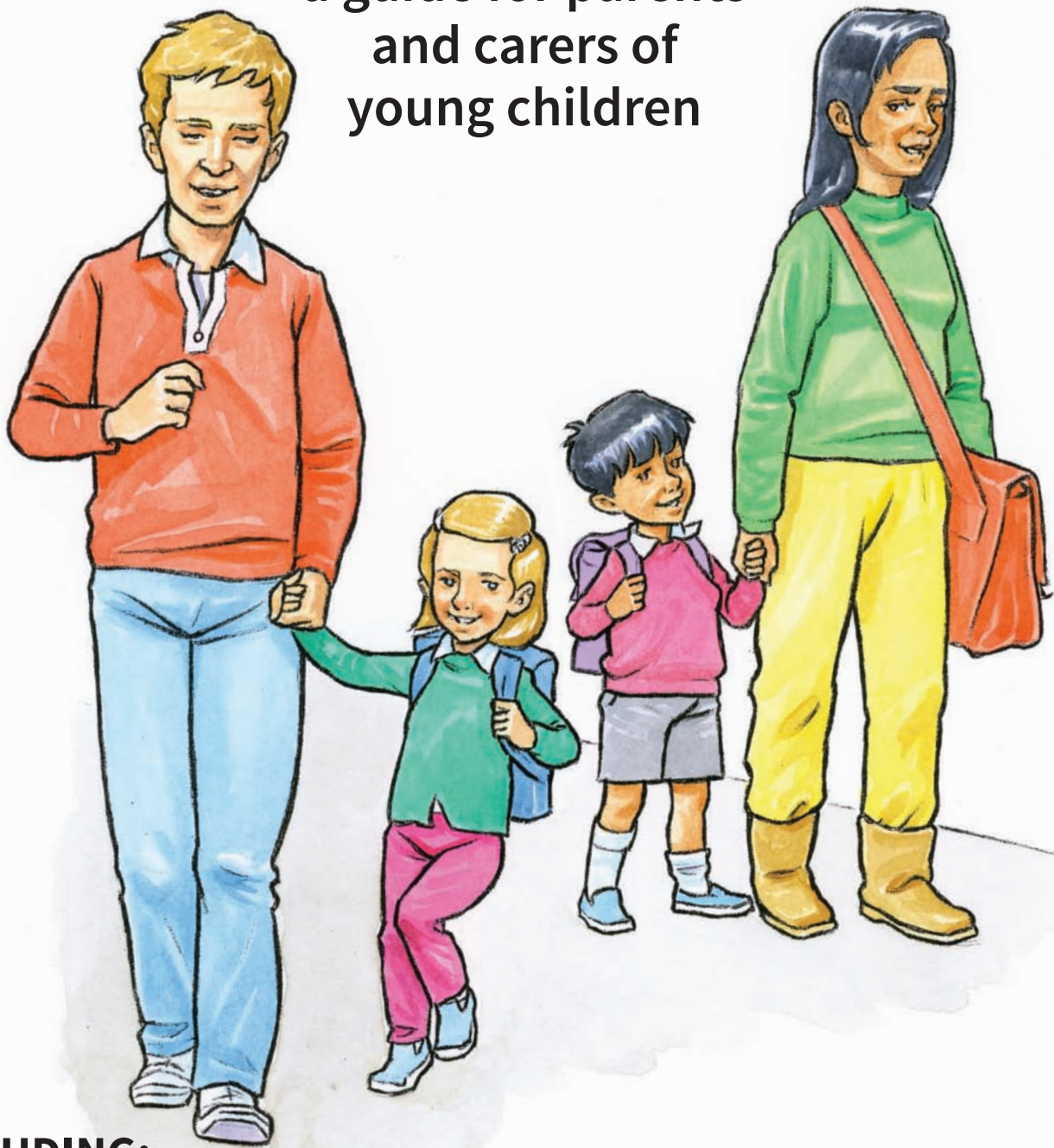


Starting Small

Getting to school the easy way –
a guide for parents
and carers of
young children



INCLUDING:
WALKING FOR HEALTH
CREATING SPECIAL MOMENTS
SAVING MONEY



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

A new beginning

Illustrations: Rowan Clifford



Your child is about to start a very special chapter in their life. Going to school opens up all kinds of new opportunities. They'll be making new friends, learning new skills and playing new games. It's a really exciting time.

Of course, it can be a very emotional time, too. How did those years of being a baby and toddler pass so quickly? How will your child cope on their own? And how will you cope without your little friend chatting away beside you?

Going to school doesn't have to be sad, though. There are lots of special moments. For example:

Over 90% of parents who walk to school say it is one of the most important quality times they spend with their children.

The walk to school can be a lovely, bonding time. It's when parents learn about the new things happening in their child's life. It's when you can make your child laugh by recalling all the silly things that happened when you were at school. And it's when you can introduce them to one of the most important lessons in modern life – being safe near roads.

Preparing for that first day

Starting school does bring its challenges – and getting to school on time is definitely one of them!

We all know those days when it seems to take half the morning just to get out of the front door. So, in preparation for the new term, build a new routine a week or so beforehand – where your child has eaten, had their teeth brushed and is dressed by the time you need to leave. You might find your child needs both an earlier bedtime and waking up time than at present.

If there is a school uniform, get your child to wear it a few times round the house. This is especially important for new shoes to ensure they are worn in.

When you go past the new school, point out interesting things. For example:

“Look! That’s the playground we will be playing in after school.”

Tip

Ask an admired older cousin or friend to talk about the fun things they do at school!

Children may have all kinds of unspoken concerns, such as:

“Will there be any lunch?”

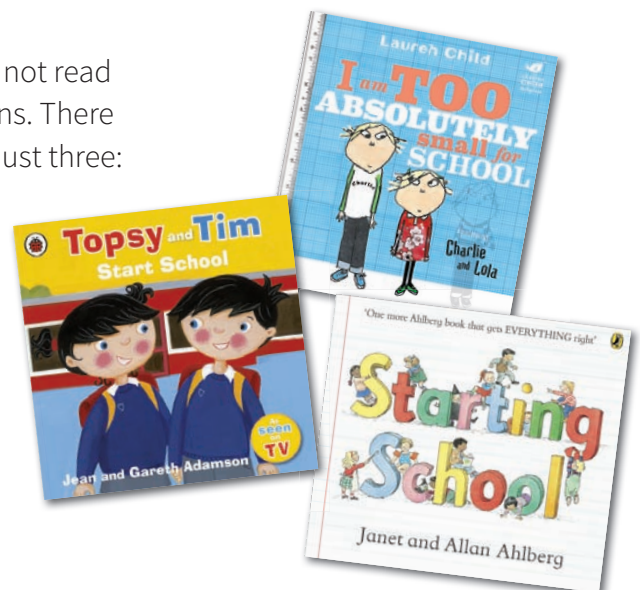
“How will I find the loo?”

“Do I have to find my own way home?”

To prepare your child practically and emotionally, why not read some storybooks together? It will help prompt questions. There are lots of great books about starting school. Here are just three:

- **Starting School** by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (Puffin, £6.99)
- **I Am Absolutely Too Small for School** by Lauren Child (Orchard Books, £6.99)
- **Topsy and Tim: Start School** by Jean and Gareth Adamson (Ladybird, £4.99)

Ask your local library for suggestions of other children’s books that can help you prepare for the big day.



Getting to school



The first thing to remember about getting to school is that it always takes longer to get out of the door with children. So, allow extra time!

Of course, you will want to make the most of that first, special day. Initially, it may seem easier to drive but it is worth remembering that during rush hour, an astonishing one in five cars is on the school run. At that time of day, roads are busier, journeys take longer, and the time needed is less predictable. And that just sounds stressful...

To ensure vehicles can see you, it's a good idea to wear bright, fluorescent colours. A bright yellow tabard is ideal and will make sure your child stands out when on roads.

Wouldn't you rather be concentrating on the person that matters rather than worrying about traffic jams, parking spaces or, even worse, parking fines?

In the UK, most primary school pupils live 1.5 miles away or less from school. And most parents and children can comfortably walk 1 mile in around 20 minutes. So, your walk to school is likely to take less than half an hour.

Feeling fine!

It's possible you and your child may be feeling anxious about starting school. Here's the good news! One of the best ways to relieve stress is exercise. So, walking to school will actually help reduce the pressure for both of you.

And it's not just your mental wellbeing that will feel the benefit, your bank balance will be thanking you, too.

Walking to school every day is also the ideal opportunity to introduce your child to the habit of taking regular exercise.

Of course, the weather won't be perfect every day! But it's still important to exercise throughout the year. With the right clothing and footwear, such as raincoats and wellies or waterproof shoes, there's no reason not to walk all year round.



**Shhh –
don't tell
the gym!**

Walking with your children is good for you, too. It improves your heart and circulation, increases mental health and wellbeing, helps with weight loss and boosts your immune system.

Children love to hear about what their parents did at school. Tell stories about the silly things that happened when you were small – the funnier, the better!

Aim to arrive at school about 10-15 minutes early. You can talk on the way, get your child settled at school and say goodbye – all without rushing.

In the weeks before term starts, why not do a practice walk to school to see how long it takes? Don't forget to carry the school bag to see if that slows you both down.

Game on!

The walk to school is a great chance to play games that reinforce your child's education.

Counting games For example, how many blue cars can you see? Or how many lamp posts have you passed? When you've walked past five lamp posts, say, your child has to shout, "**Lamp post!**"

Alphabet games Help you child recognise letters by spotting them on vehicle number plates. To begin with, just do single letters. As your child grows in confidence, you can find the letters in simple words, such as "**C-A-T**" or "**D-O-G**".

Nature watch Help you child learn about nature by asking them to look out for things. For example: "**Can you see something that has spots?**" (for example, a ladybird or Dalmatian dog). Or "**Can you see something that makes or carries its own home?**" (such as a bird or a snail). Then ask your child to set you things to look out for.



Walking for good

Making your way to school without using the car can have real benefits for your child. Studies show that children who walk to school settle down to lessons quicker than those who arrive by car. They arrive at school more ready to learn, do better in tests and achieve higher grades.

Government guidelines state that children need at least one hour of physical exercise every day. Worryingly, it's thought that nearly three-quarters of children don't achieve that.

According to the NHS, nine out of ten children could grow up with life-threatening diseases such as cancer, type 2 diabetes or heart disease, partly because they aren't getting enough exercise.

People who travel in cars can suffer three times as much pollution as those who walk. This is because they are sitting in the exhaust fumes of the car in front.



FACT

Britain's parents spend more than £51million every year on driving their children less than a mile to school!

Here's the good news, though – if your child walks to and from school, it can make a significant contribution to the amount of exercise they take every day. Plus, according to some academic studies, simply walking to school can improve children's social development in later years.

Of course, it doesn't have to be walking. Using a scooter or going by bicycle both help, too. **It's called "active travel" – basically, it's about getting out of the car and onto the pavement.**

Get together!



What could be better than walking to school on a sunny morning?
Walking with friends to school on a sunny morning!

Meeting up with fellow pupils on the way to school is a great way for young children to make new friends.

Did you know?

Over 70 per cent of today's parents walked to school when they were children but less than half of children walk to school today. Wouldn't you like your child to have the opportunity to walk, too?

It's no surprise that over 80 per cent of children who walk to school also meet up with classmates along the way.

Children who travel to school by car just don't get the same opportunity. Only a third of those children feel they get the chance to socialise before school begins.

Many parents arrange to meet other mums and dads on the way to school so school friends can be together. In time, this can lead to parents informally taking turns to do the school journey. This can be a real help for busy mums and dads.

For this to happen, however, parents must be absolutely sure their children will behave sensibly near roads, especially when with another adult.

Walking bus

Some schools organise walking to school in a more formal way, such as a “Walking Bus”. In a walking bus, at least two adult volunteers (one at the front and one at the back) walk the children to school. The children usually walk in pairs. The bus follows a fixed route, with designated collection points or “stops” along the way. Walking buses offer a healthy, safe and enjoyable way for children to travel to school.

Your child’s school will be able to tell you if they have a walking bus. If the school doesn’t run a walking bus scheme, the Safe and Active Travel Team at Solihull Council can advise on how to set one up.

Local knowledge

Studies show that children who walk to school have better knowledge of their local area than those who are driven to school.



Park and Stride



For some families, the trip to school is just too far to walk every day. If you live more than 30 minutes' walk from school, it may be that bit too far for young children. For others, getting to school and then on to work can be a real challenge.

If that's your situation, it's worth considering "Park and Stride". Just park the car about a 15 minute walk away, and stride your way to school.

- **Your child will get the precious exercise that prepares them for the school day**
- **You won't increase congestion and pollution near your child's school**
- **You won't get caught in traffic jams near school**
- **It will save you time trying to find a parking space**
- **You will get some exercise, too!**

If possible, park and stride both to and from school. But if you can't do that, using park and stride for even one leg of the journey is really positive. Often pubs, community centres or supermarkets will let you use their car park for park and stride, before they get busy for the day. But do ask first!

Studies show parents often underestimate how long it takes to drive, forgetting to allow for traffic jams and parking. It may be quicker to walk!

Staying safe

All parents worry about their children being near roads. It's natural. It may even be one of the reasons some parents drive to school. But, in fact, one of the best ways to teach children about road safety, is for them to experience what is safe behaviour on a day-to-day basis.

Academic studies show that children will not learn road safety if they are just told how to behave – they need to practise the required skills. By walking to school with you, children will learn by example.

With your help, they will learn how to choose safer places to cross and when are the best times to cross, as well as gain confidence in dealing with traffic.

These are incredibly important life skills in the modern world – and the sooner young children start learning them, the better.

Green Cross Code

The Green Cross Code is a great starting point for road safety education. Children are taught it at school but the Green Cross Code needs to be reinforced at home, too.

Stage one: Think first – find a safer place to cross, then stop.

Stage two: Stop! Stand on the pavement near the kerb.

Stage three: Look all around for traffic and listen.

Stage four: Wait until it's safe to cross. If traffic is coming, let it pass. When there is no traffic near, walk straight across the road.

Stage five: When it is safe, walk straight across the road. Walk quickly, but don't run. Keep looking and listening as you cross. Arrive alive!



Little lessons



Tip

To show how complex a road junction is, ask your child to look around and count all the different directions traffic might come from.

Problem: Children don't stop or look before starting to cross the road.

Action: Ask your child to point out important features, such as the kerb, gutter, pavement or a parked car. This will help them understand their role in road safety. Also, show how drivers communicate with road users. For example, reversing lights, brake lights, and indicators.

Problem: Children do not realise it's unsafe to cross near obstacles such as parked cars.

Action: Children's height gives them a low eye level. So, first of all kneel down so that you see what they see! You'll notice how little a child can see if a car is parked nearby. Ask your child to take you to a place where they can see the traffic and discuss why this is a better place.

Problem: Children do not realise the risks when crossing near complicated junctions or sharp bends.

Action: When with children, lead by example. So, only cross at safer places such as zebra crossings, pelican crossings, and traffic islands, or where there are a school crossing patrol officers (lollipop ladies and men).

School policies



Many schools have a School Travel Plan that promotes safer, active and sustainable travel to school, such as walking, cycling or scootering. It will have been produced in consultation with school staff, parents, school governors and local councils. It will aim to:

- **Reduce the number of vehicles on the journey to school**
- **Encourage more active and sustainable travel choices**
- **Improve safety on the journey to school.**

Your school should be able to provide you with a copy. It will have practical suggestions on what you can do and how you can help achieve lasting change.

Not driving to school creates a safer and healthier environment for all children.

Better for everyone

Choosing to leave your car at home or opting to park and stride, will give real benefits to your child's school.

You will help reduce congestion outside the school gate, as well as reduce pollution in the general school area. It will also lower the likelihood of road traffic incidents outside the school.

By not driving to school, you will also cut down on the creation of "rat runs" near schools. People living near schools can suffer real frustrations from parents who drive to school unnecessarily. It can cause disruptive congestion for local residents.

Some parents have been known to park so selfishly, they actually block entrances to other people's homes!

That kind of inconsiderate behaviour creates tension between the school and their neighbours – and it's not the school's fault! Schools need to have good relationships with its neighbours. So, why not help your child's school by choosing not to be part of the problem?

By cutting down on car journeys, reducing pollution and improving sustainability, you help make the world a better place for the next generation.



It's the law

If you do have to drive to school, don't ever park on the yellow zig zag lines. They are there for a reason – to keep vehicles away from vulnerable children. It is against the law, even if it is "just to drop off", with fines of £70 or more.

Help through the years



Let's be honest, road safety is something we could all improve on. That's why road safety education is so important.

Solihull Council has created all kinds of schemes to help children learn about road safety all the way through their school careers: from walking to school with a parent, on to becoming teenagers travelling to school independently and continuing through to being considerate young drivers and riders.

Some of that may seem a long way off at the moment! But below and on the next page are some of the initiatives that your child may participate in over the years.

Scootability: Scooters are a great way for young children to get around without fuss. But riding a scooter on a pavement comes with responsibilities towards pedestrians. This course teaches young children how to behave when on their scooters.



More great ideas on the next page!

Starting small – Getting to school the easy way



Junior Travel Ambassadors:

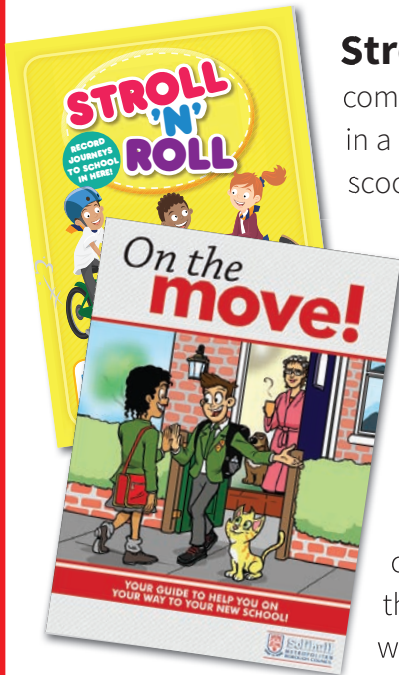
This is a primary school initiative – pupils take on the role of promoting active travel and road safety messages to other children at their school. They may also initiate campaigns aimed at parents to encourage drivers to park away from the school gate.

Bikeability:

Taught in primary schools and secondary schools, Bikeability teaches cyclists safer ways to get around when on two wheels. It promotes responsible road use and encourages sustainable, active travel.



Stroll 'n' Roll: This is an inter-class competition run by pupils. The aim is to see which class in a primary school has the most pupils choosing to walk, scooter or cycle to school, rather than taking the car.



On the Move!: This magazine and associated lesson plans are aimed at pupils in their last year at primary school. The scheme helps them prepare for making journeys on their own when they start at secondary school

How Safe are You?: Aimed at secondary school children, this scheme encourages children to consider their own safety near roads. It is worth noting, 11 to 14-year-old pedestrians are more likely to be

involved in a road traffic incident than any other pedestrian, young or old alike.



Not all schools run all these education programmes. If you want to try to improve road safety education at your child's school, contact the Safe and Active Travel Team at Solihull Council.

Remember!

Over 80 per cent of children who walk to school meet up with classmates on the way.

Most primary school pupils are a 30 minute walk – or less – from school



Driving to school costs about an extra £400 per year!

Over 70 per cent of today's parents walked to school. Now, less than half of children walk to school.



Children who walk, cycle or scooter to school are more alert, do better in tests and achieve higher grades.

Children who walk to school have better local knowledge than those who are driven.

Nine out of ten parents who walk to school say it's one of the most important quality times.

And if you really have to drive...

- **Think of the school's neighbours and park considerately. And don't park on the yellow zig zag lines. It's against the law, you face fines of £70.**
- **Try park and stride – park about 10 minutes walk away from school and make the rest of the way by foot.**
- **Try car sharing with other parents who need to go to school by car.**

Contact details

If you would like to ask the **Safe and Active Travel** at **Solihull Council** about any of the topics in this publication, contact us at:

roadsafety@solihull.gov.uk or **0121 704 6359**