



Why My Child Walks or Bikes to School

1. *It's healthy for my child*

In Sacramento County, approximately 1 out of 3 youth are overweight or obese[1]. Children need at least one hour of moderate activity a day, and ideally more[2]. When my child walks and bikes to school they will be more physically active, which decreases their risk of being overweight or having diabetes. In addition, my child will arrive to school more attentive and ready to learn.

2. *It's safe*

A good Safe Routes to School program is designed with education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering and evaluation (the 5 E's) in mind. Research finds a *decline* in the number of child pedestrian and bicycle injuries in areas that implement Safe Routes to School programs[3]. The more people who walk and bike down the street, the *safer* it becomes with more "eyes on the street".

3. *It's fun*

Children report enjoying walking or biking to school, especially when they walk or bike with a parent or caregiver, a friend or a group of other children. For schools that have contests or prizes for students that walk or bike, the incentive and enjoyment is even greater.

4. *It teaches responsibility and empowers my child*

Walking to school develops time and task management: to dress, pack supplies, get organized and start the trip in a timely and organized manner, which are good life skills to start learning as a child. Our children rely on us as parents to teach them how to be smart, strong, and safe. If we don't give them opportunities to learn independence, we risk ending up with over-reliant children who don't have proper coping skills or self-confidence. When my child walks or bikes to school, we're letting them know that they competent and trustworthy -- that they have personal power.

5. *It saves money*

I can save on gas costs and wear and tear on my car by making fewer trips. Also, we collectively save money on health related illness when our children walk and bike to school. The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) reported that costs due to obesity, physical inactivity, and overweight in California reached \$21.7 billion in 2000[4].

6. *It's good for my school*

Many schools in Sacramento County have major traffic congestion around the school at drop-off and pick-up times. When my child walks or bikes to school, it translates into less traffic congestion around the school. Fewer cars on the road improve our air quality[5], and decreases the chance of pedestrian or bicyclist injuries.

7. *It's good for our air.*

According to California Breathing, asthma rates have increased over the past 10 years[6]. In Sacramento County, 20% of all adults and 17% of youth age 18 and under have been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lives[7]. When my child walks or bikes to school, there are fewer cars on the road that contribute to air pollutants that can cause asthma attacks.

8. *It's good for our planet*

With fewer parents driving their kids to school, less carbon dioxide is released into the air – a major cause of global warming.

9. *In Perspective:*

- Chance of your child being overweight or obese in our region: 1 in 3 [1]
- Chance of your child having asthma in our region: 1 in 6 [7]
- Lifetime chance of your child dying of heart disease (leading cause of death in the U.S.): 1 in 5 [8]
- Chance of your child being killed in an automobile accident next year: 1 in 7,700 [9]
- Chance of your child being struck by lightning next year: 1 in 500,000 [10]
- Chance your child will be abducted by a stranger next year: 1 in 610,000 [11]

10. *Are walking and biking more dangerous than other modes of travel?*

Transportation professionals don't currently have an accurate sense of how many miles people walk and bike each year, or how many minutes or hours people spend walking or biking (and thus how long they are exposed to motor vehicle traffic, for example). Therefore, there is no reliable source of exposure data to really answer this question. However, we can say that there has been a drop in pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities over the past 10 years[12].

11. *"Bringing it Home":*

The health risks from being sedentary are far greater than any other risks facing our children. Walking and biking to school is a wonderful way to keep our kids physically active and healthy. Walking and biking to school builds self-management skills, confidence, and friendships.

Sources:

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