



# Help, my daughter is expected to walk to school by herself!

How many times have I overheard mothers at the WAC talking about this unfamiliar routine. Do you belong to the parents whose children are going to start kindergarten or a new school after summer? What a challenge.

## Too big a risk to take?

What in other countries is considered completely negligent and often even illegal, is absolutely normal here. So no wonder parents would feel overwhelmed by the idea of their children being expected to walk to school without parental supervision. What a risk to take!

But be assured that the teachers are well aware of the challenging first steps into independence especially with the younger ones. A teacher in kindergarten or primary school will therefore call you if your child hasn't arrived on time. As we all know small children don't have a sense of time and can easily forget the world around them being fascinated by a snail or the work on a building-site...

"It took me two years to give up my concerns and let my 4.5 year-old walk to school alone. Still, I will remind her what to do if I am not at home when she returns, who she can go with, or what to do if older children tease her on the way. And of course, my cell phone number is in her schoolbag at all times..." a parent said.

## Road safety instruction

Mostly during kindergarten and 1st to 3rd grade a traffic policeman or woman will come to school and teach the children how to cross the street properly. In most communities the children will be given a safety triangle to wear over their tops. Sometimes you see them in different colours for younger and older children. Even though they're really useful, latest after first grade wearing them is too uncool ☹️.



## Kids crossing - Road safety

### road safety for parents

- Accompany your child to school several times on foot and make them aware of risks.
- Do not take your child by car. There have been dangerous situations right because of waiting cars around schools. Allow your child to actively experience his or her way to school.
- Walking in groups can help your child building up confidence, yet some children are less attentive when walking with others.
- Send your child to school on time. Rush and hurry increase the risk of an accident.
- Make sure your child wears bright clothes, especially in bad weather conditions.

### road safety for drivers

- It is difficult for children to assess the distance and speed of vehicles. Always come to a complete stop at pedestrian crossings. The children learn "Rad steht, Kind geht." which means they only walk once the wheels are really still.
- Do not wave the children across. This may cause them to cross the road without paying attention to oncoming traffic.
- Children are often inattentive. Therefore, stay focused when driving, and always be ready to brake.
- Don't be annoyed when children don't walk with no car around but wait until a car approaches and is forced to stop right in front of them ☺️.



## The idea behind it

The walk to school and back is a really important social part of school life. Apart from learning to act safely in traffic, children learn to assert and integrate in a group. They feel independent and raise their self-awareness. It is an opportunity to learn about responsibility in the outside world - without adult supervision. (Yet the concerns as a parent are often bigger than the wish to teach self-responsibility at this early age...)The moving is good for their health and supports their concentration in school. Walking to school will also

facilitate friendships for your kids. Because of all these benefits there has been a campaign in some places called "Walk to school" where children earn points walking and not driving to school.

### **How long should I walk with my child?**

Even though parents are sometimes explicitly instructed to not walk the children to class longer than two weeks the teachers know that some children take more time than others until they feel confident enough to walk to school by themselves. Usually after 3 months the majority of the children will manage a reasonable way. But if you don't feel good about it, trust your instincts, maybe talk to the teacher. There's a big difference between walking to school under normal circumstances and dealing with special situations like a lorry on the pavement. It takes time and practising until the child is able to judge all the challenging situations that can occur. And it takes time for you as a parent too, to feel comfortable with the idea ☺.

### **The bad guy who pulls kids into his car**

The absolute worst nightmare of every parent. Every now and then there are stories about drivers trying to harass schoolchildren. True or not: you can be sure that in case of more frequent incidents, your school will inform the parents on how to behave best. They would also talk in class about proper behaviour towards strangers.

### **Can the school really forbid my child taking the bicycle to school? What about a "fäG"?**

In contrast to what even Swiss people will tell you, there's no law prohibiting children from riding the bicycle to school or taking the scooter. The idea that this is not allowed stems from the time when the way to school was under the school's insurance protection. With the accident insurance now integrated in the health insurance, the parents bear the legal responsibility.

The school is though theoretically allowed to decide for no parking on the school grounds.

So even though the children could take their bicycle, there are these myths that for example they can't take it unless they have passed their bicycle test in 5th grade or unless you live more than a kilometre away. And don't you dare question that! I once asked my daughter in 3rd grade to take the bicycle since we had to go somewhere right after that. She was attacked by other children in such a harsh way since it was "against the rules" that she refused to repeat that for a whole year, simply to avoid another negative experience.

The same as for the bicycle applies to the "fäG". "FäG" is the term for a vehicle/ means of locomotion with wheels that is actuated through own physical strength like roller skates, skateboards, scooters and bicycles for preschoolers." FäG" is short for "fahrzeugähnliches Gerät", a device that is similar to a vehicle.



### **The law asks for a "reasonable" way to school**

It is up to the community to offer transport by school bus or public transport if the walk is too long or to have lollipop ladies at more dangerous crossings. In case nothing is officially organised, parents often take turns in walking a whole group of children.

Quite often additional measures are only provided for the lower school years. Children from 4<sup>th</sup> grade on are mostly expected to ride by bicycle if the way is too long to walk.

So there are definitely ups and downs to the whole topic. And let's be honest: it also adds to our own freedom if we don't have to organise and join our children all the time ☺

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**9<sup>th</sup> September 8.15-11.45 am**

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General information, Swiss school system (from kindergarten to apprenticeship/ university), school customs, do's and don'ts, Swiss manners, local customs, food and "unwritten rules" of daily life and so many more topics are covered in this fantastic and informative class. Professional presentation, helpful handouts and more.

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Mirjam is a native Swiss and trained coach for English speaking people, teacher in the Swiss school system and experienced in personal development. For more on Mirjam: [www.coaching-lounge.ch](http://www.coaching-lounge.ch) or pick a flyer in the WAC-clubroom.

