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### Subject

Navigating Traffic Environments Safely

### Age level

Recommended for fourth to eighth grades (ages 8 – 12)

### Background

Children see, hear and process information differently than adults. Younger children, for example, do not have the developmental skills to adequately assess traffic and speeds. This puts children a greater risk for road traffic related injuries, particularly while they are walking. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that children always walk and cross streets with an adult prior to age 10. After age 10 and during the teen years, children begin to develop the cognitive ability to assess speed and distance. At the same time, children are becoming more independent and beginning to explore the world, not just on foot but also with technology. By the time they are teenagers, kids are seeking freedom and yet are dependent on their devices to stay connected to their world.

This pedestrian safety lesson plan will help students become more aware of their surroundings during this exploratory phase of their lives, especially in an environment that could pose many risks. It will give them an opportunity to learn about the traffic environment, driver behavior, how to avoid distracted walking, and how to stay safe while crossing the street. It also highlights the importance of safety when using his or her phone, tablet or music player while walking.

### Goal

The purpose of this lesson plan is to prepare kids to walk safely when in areas where cars, trucks, bikes and motorbikes all compete for the same space on the road. This will help them become aware of their surroundings, learn the risks associated with crossing the street while distracted, and understand the traffic signs and signals. After participating in this lesson plan students will be able to demonstrate an increase in knowledge of road safety, traffic signs, and safe crossing techniques.

### Discussion Topics

**(Review the Pedestrian Safety Key Messages on the last page prior to teaching the lesson.)**

- Define and discuss traffic.
  - *Traffic safety is about how to walk safely and navigate around other road users.*
- Ask students if they walk to school and reasons why they do or don't.
- Ask the class what might be dangerous about the walking environment in their community.
  - Ask students where they walk (sidewalk, side of street, facing traffic).
  - Have they ever felt unsafe while walking? Why?
  - What are some dangerous things that they notice in their neighborhood?
- Ask the students what they consider to be the responsibilities of a pedestrian, cyclist and drivers on the road. What should each do to stay safe and keep others safe?



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- *What does a safe street look like and what can they do to make themselves safe on any street?*
  - Ask the students of the different types of traffic signs or signals they have seen, discuss each one mentioned. *Show examples of different types of signs with printed materials.*
    - Ask the students what the “**yield**” sign means. *How is this different from a stop sign?*
      - *Yield or **give way** traffic sign indicates that a driver of a vehicle must slow down and prepare to stop if necessary (usually while merging into traffic on another road) but is not required to stop. This is important to note because a car might not stop when you expect them to.*
  - Discuss why signs, signals and laws are needed to keep pedestrians safe while they are walking
    - *Signs tell drivers and road users the legal, recommended way to behave on the road.*
    - *Signals are used so that vehicles, bicycles and pedestrian traffic are managed on the roads.*
    - *Signs and signals help manage the flow of traffic so that it is safe for all road users to use together.*
  - Ask the students if they have seen drivers practice unsafe behaviors? Were they following signs, signals, and rules of the road?
  - Ask the students if some roads and streets may be harder to cross than others. Why?
    - If there is no sidewalk, where is the safest place to walk and cross the street?
  - Ask the students if they have seen any other friends or classmates do dangerous or safe things while walking.
    - Ask the students if they have ever been hit by a car or know a friend or classmate who has?
    - Ask students about the dangers of crossing against the signal or at undesignated crossings, i.e. mid-block.
  - Ask the students to make a list of all the things that they can do, wear or use to make them more visible when walking on or near the road.
    - Highlight making eye contact with drivers

### **Distracted Pedestrians**

Pre-teens and teens account for 50 percent of child pedestrian injuries. The 2012 Safe Kids Teens and Distraction report found that students state that parents and teachers speak with them less about safety as they get older. We can remind pre-teens and teens that taking a moment to lower their cell phone, headphones or any electronic device before crossing the street could be the difference between life and death. It’s a valuable discussion to have when talking about distracted driving—another danger for pre-teens and teens that are looking forward to getting their drivers’ license. Encourage students to keep the volume off on headphones and keep their eyes on the road when crossing a street.

### **Discussion Topics**

- Ask the students to raise their hand if they have a cell phone, music player, or any other electronic device they carry with them to school.
- Ask the students to raise their hand if they use these devices as they are walking and crossing the street.



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- Ask them why that might be dangerous.
  - Ask them if they have ever walked into something, tripped or if they have been hit or almost hit while walking distracted.
  - Ask them what advice they would give their friends who are walking distracted.
    - *Put your device down, look up, and make eye contact with drivers before crossing. Remember to watch out for cars that are turning or backing up.*
    - *Always walk on sidewalks or paths and cross at street corners, use traffic signals and crosswalks.*
    - *If you need to use a cell phone, stop on the sidewalk and find a safe area to talk. Look up and pay extra attention when using headphones and turn the volume off when crossing the street.*

### Pedestrian Safety Key Messages

**Be sure the following topics/rules are covered as you go over the students responses:**

- Cross the street at the corner or at a crosswalk if there is one. Make eye contact with drivers before crossing.
- Walk on sidewalks or paths and cross at street corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks. Avoid crossing mid-block.
- Put down phones and turn off the volume of headphones when crossing the street.
- Walk with an adult until you are at least 10 years old.
- Be visible. If you walk when it is dark, wear light-colored clothing or clothing with reflective material so drivers can see you.
- Only cross in front of a school bus when the driver says it is safe. Do not cross behind the bus or where the driver can't see you.
- Look left, right and left again before you cross and keep looking in all directions until you reach the other side.
- If a toy or pet goes out into the street, ask an adult for help getting it back.
- When you are outside playing, play in a backyard or playground away from the street or parking lots.

**If working with children under 10 years old, consider addressing these additional topics as this lesson plan is geared towards older kids walking alone:**

- Discuss with the students why they should not walk alone until they are at least 10 years old.
- Discuss why younger children may need to walk with an adult and/or to hold a grown-up's hand while they cross the streets.



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- Ask the student who can help them to cross the street safely and have them make a list or say it out loud.
    - Parent, guardian, older sibling, crossing guard, police officer etc.
  - Explain to the students why drivers will not be able to see them due to their smaller stature/size.
  - Introduce the basic traffic signs to gauge the students level of knowledge and to explain the meaning of each sign.
  - Explain to the students that it is difficult to judge the speed of cars, how far away they are, and which direction traffic sounds are coming from.

