

INTRODUCTION

You probably have fond memories of walking to school when you were a child. They may include walking with your parents or friends, saying good morning to your favourite crossing guard, or walking in the rain wearing your raincoat and rubber boots. For some people the days of walking to school seem long gone, and driving has become the norm.

According to a survey of parents in 2014, 58% reported that they walked to school when they were children, compared to only 28% of their children today (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014).

The 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth reported a further decline in active transportation, with only 21% of Canadian children (ages 5-19 years) reporting that they walked or biked to school.

The decline in active transportation to and from school is a concern. Research shows Canadian children are not active enough, receiving a grade of D+ on the 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card for physical activity. In fact, only 39% of children ages 5-17 are meeting the Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines (ParticipACTION, 2020).

Canada's 24-hour movement guidelines recommend that children and youth between the ages of 5 to 17 years be physically active for 60 minutes each day (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2016). For good health, children should take part in activities that:

- Work the heart and lungs (e.g., jogging, biking, playing soccer).
- Build strong bones and muscles (e.g., climbing on playground equipment, shoveling snow, playing catch).
- Increase flexibility (e.g., yoga, stretching, martial arts).

The good news is that walking to and from school is a great way for children to build activity into their day. The purpose of this resource is to provide parents with information on things they can do to get children walking to and from school. This resource is divided into two sections:

SECTION ONE PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF:

- The importance of physical activity for children.
- Recommendations for physical activity in children.
- Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS).

SECTION TWO PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF:

- Common barriers of walking to school.
- Possible solutions to the barriers of walking to school.
- How to start a formal walking program, such as ASRTS.





REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELPS:

- Build strong bones and muscles.
- Strengthen the heart.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Improve fitness.

Research shows that regular physical activity:

- Improves self-esteem, self-efficacy, pro-social behavior, and life satisfaction.
- Support positive mental health (lower symptoms of anxiety and depression).
- Increases learning and academic performance in areas such as attention span, problem-solving skills, and concentration.
- Plays a role in weight management (when paired with healthy nutrition), which can decrease the risk of chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes.
- Helps establish positive habits that can carry over to adulthood.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILDREN

It is recommended that children and youth participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day.

(Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2016).

Moderate activity includes:

- Brisk walking
- Skating
- Swimming
- Bike riding
- Playing outdoors

Vigorous activity includes:

- Running
- Playing basketball
- Playing soccer



ACTIVITIES MIGHT BE ORGANIZED (E.G., TEAM SPORTS)
OR UNSTRUCTURED PLAY (E.G., TAG).



WHAT IS ACTIVE AND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (ASRTS)?

ASRTS started in Canada in the 1990s. The goal is to encourage children and parents to use active transportation such as walking or biking when going to and from school.

ASRTS promotes safe routes so children and youth can be more active before, during, and after school. To encourage walking, the ASRTS program helps to ensure that supports such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and signs are in place.

WHY IS **ASRTS** IMPORTANT?

- ASRTS gets children active and builds physical activity into their day.
- Parents can teach children pedestrian safety rules while walking. Children can practice these skills with an adult present. This helps prepare children for independent walking as they get older. See Section 2 for links to safety rules.
- Children who are physically active on a regular basis show academic and cognitive improvements. In fact, the parts of the brain which are important for learning and memory have been found to be larger in those who are physically active (ParticipACTION, 2020). These differences can lead to improved performance with reading and math skills.

• If more children walked, fewer cars would be on the road and around the school. This change can make it safer for students traveling to and from school. It can also help reduce air pollution.





ASRTS HAS MANY LOOKS

Below are a few of the various ASRTS activities. Schools can use one or a number of the following:

INTERNATIONAL WALK TO SCHOOL MONTH (IWALK)

IWALK takes place once a year in October. The goal of IWALK is to increase the number of students who walk to and from school throughout the month, and highlights a specific day. For more information about IWALK go to www.saferoutestoschool.ca and follow the top menu *Making It Happen*, to *Walk and Wheel Events*, to *Walk to School Month*.

WALKING SCHOOL BUS

Students who live in the same neighbourhood walk to and from school together. A volunteer, such as a parent, walks with students. Volunteers can take turns on different days of the week.

 MOVING MONDAYS, TOURING TUESDAYS, WALKING WEDNESDAYS, TREKKING THURSDAYS, PHYS. ED. FRIDAYS

The goal is to pick a day per month or per week as a "Walk to School Day". On this day, students are encouraged to walk as much as possible. Schools can use the names above or come up with their own.

Everyone at school can benefit from walking more throughout the day. Try one of the following challenges in your classroom, or across the school, to get students and teachers moving:

Walking Challenge/ Kilometre Club

At lunch, recess, or before classes start, students and teachers walk around the school yard. The gym or hallways can be used on bad weather days. Students can measure the distance of their walking area, so they can track how far they've walked or how many times they need to walk around the area to complete one kilometre or one mile.

Walk Across Canada Challenge

The aim is for students and teachers to track the number of footsteps over a certain time period.

Use these steps to virtually travel from one end of the country to the other. You can use a map to track the progress of the class or the school.

WINTER WALK DAY

Organize a walk to school day during the winter, or walk to a local skating rink, or hold a winter carnival in the school yard during lunch.

For more information on these activities and others, go to www.saferoutestoschool.ca

For more information on ASRTS walking programs, check out the Ontario Active School Travel website at https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca

For more information on how to get children more active, check out the homepage for Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/child_youth/index.html



HOW PARENTS CAN ADDRESS COMMON BARRIERS
OF WALKING TO AND FROM SCHOOL.



This section offers suggestions on how parents can address common barriers of walking to and from school. There are two parts:

- **1. An informal program** for parents who want their children to walk to school but who are not interested in a structured walking program.
- **2. A formal program** for parents who want to start a structured walking program at their children's school.

INFORMAL PROGRAM

If you're interested in having your child walk to and from school, safety is probably your primary concern. In addition to safety, there may be other barriers to consider.

Common Barriers	Possible Solutions	Who to Contact
Sidewalk conditions (e.g., snow covered, cracked pavement, items blocking your path such as poles, signs, shrubs, dumpsters)	Shovel ice and snow from the sidewalk in front of your home and the sidewalk adjacent to any alley-ways.	City of Windsor Call: 311 www.citywindsor.ca Amherstburg Call: 519-736-0012 www.amherstburg.ca
	 Contact your local municipality if you have any questions on snow and ice removal. Keep sidewalks free of clutter. 	Essex Call: 519-776-7336 www.essex.ca Kingsville Call: 519-733-2305 www.kingsville.ca Lakeshore Call: 519-728-2700 www.lakeshore.ca LaSalle Call: 519-969-7770 www.town.lasalle.on.ca Leamington Call: 519-326-5761 www.leamington.ca Tecumseh Call: 519-735-2184 www.tecumseh.ca



Common Barriers	Possible Solutions	Who to Contact

Weather conditions

 Children can walk to and from school in all types of weather.
 Wearing the proper gear is important. The Coats for Kids Program collects coats for children in need. Sizes range from infant to adult. The program starts in November. Coat distribution sites are located throughout Windsor-Essex County. For more information, contact 211 or visit https://211southwest.ca enter your location and search Coats for Kids in the Keyword Search box.

TIPS FOR WALKING IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER

During hot weather:

- Wear sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeves, and pants.
- Wear sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Stay hydrated. Carry a water bottle.

For more information on sun safety, visit *www.wechu.org* and select Your Environment from the top menu, then Sun Safety from the right side menu.

During rainy weather:

- Carry an umbrella.
- Wear a waterproof coat (raincoat) and waterproof shoes/boots.

During cold weather:

- Wear warm, waterproof boots.
- Wear a warm coat.
- Wear a hat and mittens.
- Wear a scarf over face and mouth on very cold days. Below -25 °C is too cold to walk to school (Parachute, nd).

ALSO:

 Put an extra pair of socks and mittens in your child's backpack, so wet items can be changed.

For more information on how to stay safe and warm during the cold weather, visit www.parachutecanada.org and search Winter Safety. Scroll down and select Winter Safety from the list.





Common Possioso	Passible Colutions	Who to Contact
Heavy traffic	Possible Solutions Contact your local municipality to find out how to address this issue.	Who to Contact City of Windsor Call: 311 www.citywindsor.ca
		Amherstburg <i>Call:</i> 519-736-0012 www.amherstburg.ca
		Essex Call: 519-776-7336 www.essex.ca
		Kingsville <i>Call:</i> 519-733-2305 www.kingsville.ca
		Lakeshore <i>Call:</i> 519-728-2700 www.lakeshore.ca
		LaSalle <i>Call:</i> 519-969-7770 www.town.lasalle.on.ca
		Leamington <i>Call:</i> 519-326-5761 www.leamington.ca
		Tecumseh <i>Call:</i> 519-735-2184 www.tecumseh.ca
Speeding, careless, or aggressive	Call local police.	Windsor Police Call: 519-258-6111
driving	Most county municipalities are serviced by Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). Also, if on a provincial highway, call OPP.	Amherstburg Police Services Call: 519-736-3622
		Essex OPP Call: 1-888-310-1122 or if using a cell phone dial *opp.
	Remember, 911 is for emergency use only.	Kingsville OPP Call: 1-888-310-1122 or if using a cell phone dial *opp.
		Lakeshore OPP Call: 1-888-310-1122 or if using a cell phone dial *opp.
		LaSalle Police Services Call: 519-969-5210
		Leamington Police Services Call: 1-888-310-1122 or if using a cell phone dial *opp.
		Tecumseh OPP Call: 1-888-310-1122 or if using a cell phone dial *opp.



Common Barriers	Possible Solutions	Who to Contact
No sidewalks	Contact your local municipality to find out how to address this issue.	City of Windsor Call: 311 www.citywindsor.ca
		Amherstburg Call: 519-736-0012 www.amherstburg.ca
		Essex Call: 519-776-7336 www.essex.ca
		Kingsville <i>Call:</i> 519-733-2305 www.kingsville.ca
		Lakeshore <i>Call:</i> 519-728-2700 www.lakeshore.ca
		LaSalle <i>Call:</i> 519-969-7770 www.town.lasalle.on.ca
		Leamington <i>Call:</i> 519-326-5761 www.leamington.ca
		Tecumseh <i>Call:</i> 519-735-2184 www.tecumseh.ca
Distance - too far to walk	Park your vehicle a little distance away from the school and walk the rest of the way.	
Lack of pedestrian safety skills	Teach your child pedestrian safety skills.	PARACHUTE CANADA Go to www.parachutecanada.org under Injury Topics, click on Pedestrian Safety.



Common Barriers	Possible Solutions	Who to Contact
Personal safety For example, children are too young to walk by themselves and a parent or guardian is unable to walk with them.	Find a walking buddy or trusted adult who is willing to walk your child. Start a Walking School Bus Program at your school. Find out if there is a Block Parent Program in your neighborhood, if not, start one. Learn about Neighborhood Watch	For information on the Walking School Bus, go to www.walkingschoolbus.org Call: 211 https://211southwest.ca enter your location and search Block Parents in the Keyword Search box. Call: 211 https://211southwest.ca enter your location and search Neighbourhood
Lack of crossing guards	Contact your local municipality to	Watch in the Keyword Search box. City of Windsor Call: 311
8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8	find out how to address this issue.	www.citywindsor.ca
		Amherstburg Call: 519-736-0012 www.amherstburg.ca
		Essex Call: 519-776-7336 www.essex.ca
		Kingsville <i>Call: 519-733-2305</i> www.kingsville.ca
		Lakeshore <i>Call:</i> 519-728-2700 www.lakeshore.ca
		LaSalle <i>Call:</i> 519-969-7770 www.town.lasalle.on.ca
		Leamington <i>Call:</i> 519-326-5761 www.leamington.ca
		Tecumseh <i>Call:</i> 519-735-2184 www.tecumseh.ca



Common Barriers	Possible Solutions	Who to Contact
Lack of time in the morning	Here are a few things you and your child can do the night before to help save time in the morning: a. Make lunches b. Take showers	Visit https://food-guide.canada.ca/ en/healthy-eating-resources to learn more about how much and what types of foods your child needs, as well as the benefits of eating well and being active.
	c. Lay out clothes d. Pack backpack e. Check weather report	For breakfast tips for you and your children, go to www.eatrightontario.ca and enter breakfast in the search box.
• Limited access to nutritious food	Walking to school takes energy. Make sure your child is getting a proper breakfast.	Food Banks Call: 211 https://211southwest.ca enter your location and search Food banks in the Keyword Search box.
Bullying		Contact your school principal or school
		nurse. To find your school nurse, call the school health hotline at 519-258-2146 ext. 1555.
		For more information on bullying, visit www.edu.gov.on.ca and enter Bullying in the search box. Bullying – We Can All Help Stop It is a helpful resource.
Lack of pedestrian safety skills	Teach your child pedestrian safety skills.	KIDestrians is a step-by-step guide to teach children traffic safety rules. The guide has 12 different exercises for parents to use with their children. Go to www.oxfordcounty.ca and enter KIDestrians in the search box.
		PARACHUTE CANADA Go to www.parachutecanada.org, under Injury Topics, click on " Pedestrian Safety.

With the time that you save by getting ready at night, you can walk your child to school!



Common Barriers	Possible Solutions	Who to Contact
• Graffiti	Contact your local municipality to find out how to address this issue.	City of Windsor Call: 311 www.citywindsor.ca
	Also, teach children about respecting property.	Amherstburg Call: 519-736-0012 www.amherstburg.ca
	property.	Essex Call: 519-776-7336 www.essex.ca
		Kingsville <i>Call:</i> 519-733-2305 www.kingsville.ca
		Lakeshore <i>Call:</i> 519-728-2700 www.lakeshore.ca
		LaSalle <i>Call:</i> 519-969-7770 www.town.lasalle.on.ca
		Leamington <i>Call:</i> 519-326-5761 www.leamington.ca
		Tecumseh <i>Call:</i> 519-735-2184 www.tecumseh.ca



FORMAL PROGRAM

If you want to start a more structured walking program at your children's school, this section is for you. In partnership with local municipality representatives or urban planning consultants your committee can work towards making a more walkable neighbourhood for everyone to enjoy!

STEP ONE: Talk it up

- Talk to your school principal about hosting an ASRTS presentation for interested parents.
- Contact your school's nurse to book a presentation. Call the Windsor-Essex County Healthy Unit's Healthy Schools hotline at 519-258-2146 ext. 1555 to be directed to the appropriate nurse.



STEP TWO: Promote the Presentation

• Help spread the word of upcoming presentations through your school's newsletter. Feel free to use the appropriate text supplied below (for bussed or urban schools) to generate parental interest in the program.

Bussed Schools

Do you want to help your child lead a more active lifestyle? Learn how physical activity benefits your child's learning by coming out to an upcoming "Active and Safe Routes to School" forum for parents. The Active & Safe Routes to School program looks at the need for safe neighbourhoods so children can be more active before, during, and after school. For more information, contact your school nurse at 519-258-2146 ext. 1555.

Urban Schools

Do you want to save time, gas, money, and reduce morning hassles? Learn how physical activity benefits your child's learning by coming out to an upcoming "Active and Safe Routes to School" forum for parents. The Active & Safe Routes to School program looks at the need for safe neighbourhoods so children can be more active before, during, and after school. For more information, contact your school nurse at 519-258-2146 ext. 1555.



STEP THREE: The Presentation

- Your school public health nurse can provide the ASRTS presentation.
- Providing child care and healthy refreshments, and staying on schedule (e.g., starting and ending on time) will contribute to a successful meeting.
- Assign a parent from the group to keep a list of common barriers identified by parents.
- Obtain contact information from interested parents for future meetings and for further information.
- Offer the following options for parents wishing to participate in the program and make note of who volunteers for the role:
 - a. Help with the walkabout *(see Step Four to the right)*.
 - b. Help map out walking routes to school.
 - c. Serve as a volunteer to walk children to school (where needed).



STEP FOUR: Walkability Check

Now that the barriers have been identified, the next step is to take a walk around your school neighbourhood using a walkability checklist. For an example of a checklist, visit Ontario Active School Travel to access their School Travel Planning Toolkit https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca/school-travel-planning-toolkit. You will find walkabout instructions and checklist in Phase 2: Assess Conditions. This checklist will help address the barriers discussed in the presentation and spot others.

- Refer to the previous chart of Common Barriers and Possible Solutions.
- Decide which barriers to work on first. Pick one or two to start. It takes time and energy to make changes, even small ones.
- Find out if there are other groups in your community working on active transportation issues, and, if possible, work with them.

For more information on walkable neighbourhoods please see the next page.

STEP FIVE: Pick your Program

• Once the barrier(s) have been addressed, your school can choose a walking program that meets the needs of students and parents. Please refer to Section One of this toolkit for these options.

STEP SIX: Celebrate!

 Acknowledge and celebrate your achievements with everyone involved.



WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY "WALKABLE"?

Before you set out on your neighbourhood walk to check its walkability, you need to know what that means. Keep the following points in mind as you take your walk and complete your checklist:

- **1. You can walk to the places you often go.** The ability to easily walk to the places you need to go, such as work, grocery stores, schools, restaurants, and leisure activities, promotes walking among residents.
- **2. You feel safe along the route.** If your route is well-lit, has safe walking zones such as sidewalks, traffic controls, and cross walks, you'll be more inclined to walk.
- **3. Your route is enjoyable.** An attractive neighbourhood is more inviting to walk through. Pleasant landscaping, clean roads or pathways, parkland, shade, and benches are things which might make your route more walkable.
- **4. The route is accessible.** A walkable community will allow people of all abilities to travel it. Walking, cycling, rollerblading, and those requiring mobility devices such as wheelchairs should all be able to travel easily.
- **5. You're well-connected.** The most walkable communities will have safe, clear access to a variety of locations.

Connections don't always have to be sidewalks, though. Pathways or well-marked trails are other great ways to connect locations together.

6. Is the route well-used?

As you walk around your neighbourhood, take note of how many other people are out walking. Are they friendly? Do they make you feel safe? A highly walkable area will have a wide variety of users — families, people and their pets, and individuals out for their exercise.

WALK SCORES

A Walk Score is a number assigned to the walkability of your neighbourhood or city. Addresses are scored based on the routes available to a variety of locations (e.g., schools, shops, businesses). The Score also considers the safety and "friendliness" of the routes by looking at population density, traffic flow and management, and the length of time it takes to reach certain points of interest.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

The higher the number, the more walkable your area is. The most detailed walk score site scores cities across North America out of 100 points. To check how your city ranks, visit *www.walkscore.com* and type your address into the search bar.





CONCLUSION

Now that you have an understanding of the ASRTS program, the importance of regular physical activity, as well as some common barriers and solutions for walking to school, please feel free to contact your school health nurse for more information on getting a program started. Call 519-258-2146 ext. 1555.

Visit the following links for more information on physical activity and to see other Active & Safe Routes to School initiatives.

Ontario Active School Travel https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca

Waterloo Region District School Board www.wrdsb.ca/planning/active-and-safe-routes-to-school

Active & Safe Routes to School in Manitoba www.greenactioncentre.ca/program/asrts

Ottawa Student Transportation Authority www.ottawaschoolbus.ca/active-transportation/

ParticipACTION www.participaction.ca

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