



BACK TO SCHOOL SAFETY



Whether you have children going to school this fall or not, we all share the same roads. Consider the following when school resumes in the fall:

How to Report a Tip

 Call 713.222.TIPS (8477)

 Use our **Mobile App**
Download app name: Crime Stoppers Houston

 Go to [crime-stoppers.org](https://www.crime-stoppers.org)

Tipsters will remain anonymous and could be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$5,000.

Did you know?

- 61 kids are hit by cars every day in the United States.
- It is illegal to pass a school bus that is stopped to load or unload children.
- It is illegal to pass a school bus on the right.
- The law requires that traffic in both directions stop on undivided roadways when students are entering or exiting a school bus.
- The area 10ft around a school bus is the most dangerous place for children. They are unpredictable so be extra cautious.
- Drivers should not block crosswalks when stopped. Crosswalks should be kept clear for pedestrians to cross the street safely.
- Wearing a helmet is the law! Not an option.



Safety reminders:

- Refrain from honking your horn or doing anything to rush a pedestrian in front of your car, even if you have the right-of-way.
- Leave at least 3ft between you and a cyclist.
- Check side mirrors for cyclists before opening car doors.
- Look for cyclists coming down driveways and behind cars.



Safety starts at home - let's consider the following as we are getting ready for school to resume:

- Ensure safety by having your child wear proper footwear. Rubber sole bottom shoes are the best.
- Avoid labeling your child's clothing, backpack or jackets where it's visible. You don't want strangers to be able to call out their name.
- Ensure that your child is familiar with your contact information in case of emergencies.
- Take time today to update your child's photo ID. Keeping an updated photo will help in any sort of emergency situation with law enforcement.
- Check with the school to see what the policy is regarding posting names and photos online.

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Backpack safety:

Let's keep our children pain free coming and going to school with the following backpack safety tips.

- Look for backpacks that fit your child's size and appear to be made for comfort, such as padded straps.
- The backpack shouldn't be wider or longer than your child's torso and never hanging more than 4 inches below the waist.
- Do not over-stuff the backpack; it should weigh between 10 to 20 percent of your child's body weight.
- Place the heaviest items at the bottom of the backpack.
- Both straps should be worn to distribute weight.
- Hip and chest belts help transfer the weight.
- Reflective materials enhance visibility in the early morning and at night.



Making your way to school:

Practice walking to school or to the bus stop and riding a bike before the first day of school. The practice will help you feel at ease on the first day and your child to feel comfortable and confident. If possible, follow the routine the first couple of days.

The first day of school, in particular, is a very confusing and hectic day for all.



Walking:

- HEAD UP, PHONE DOWN. We need to eliminate distracted walking.
 - Never cross the street while using an electronic device.
 - If using headphones, leave one ear free.
 - If texting, move out of the way of others and stop on the sidewalk.
- Discuss with your child what he or she should do if anyone begins to follow or approach them, including instructions to get away quickly and report it.
- Plan a route that is direct with the fewest street crossings.
- Practice walking the route with a trusted adult first and identify safe places to go if you need help before you reach your home.
- If you are unable to walk with your child, have them walk with a trusted adult or in a group.
- Walk on the sidewalk. If walking on the street is your only option, walk facing the traffic.
- Avoid running. You lessen the ability for drivers to see you and/or you could fall, resulting in injuries.
- Look all ways before crossing a street.
- Use marked crosswalks for crossing any street and utilize crossing guards.
- Be cautious when walking in front or behind parked cars.
- Walk directly to school and/or directly home; do not deviate from the planned route.



Riding a bus:

- If you are unable to walk your child to and from the bus stop, have them wait in a group.
- Learn the bus number.
- Stand six feet (3 giant steps) away from the curb as the bus approaches.
- Cross the street at crosswalk, not directly in front of a bus.
- If you cannot see the bus driver, the bus driver cannot see you.
- Never walk directly in front or behind a bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, tell the bus driver! Do not attempt to retrieve without the bus driver's approval.
- Take a seat quickly and sit quietly. Loud noises can distract the bus driver.
- Keeps hands, head and arms inside the bus at all times.
- Keep the aisles clear. Your belongings should be with you at your seat.
- Wait until the bus has reached a complete stop before proceeding off the bus.

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Riding a bike:

- If you are unable to ride with your child, have them ride in a group.
- Always wear a properly fitting helmet – it's the law!
- Bike riders must follow the same rules of traffic signs and signals as a motorist.
- Ride on the right side of the road in a single file line.
- Know appropriate hand signals.
- Come to a complete stop and look all ways before crossing a street.
- Wait for driver's signal before crossing the street.
- If riding in the dark, make sure to wear reflective clothing and have plenty of reflectors on the bike.



Riding in a car:

- Always use your seatbelt.
- ALL children younger than 13 should ride in the back seat. If you have no choice than to put a child younger than 13 in the front (for example carpooling multiple children), move the seat back as far as it will go.
- After age 4 and 40+ pounds, children can ride in a booster seat with the adult lap and shoulder belt until the adult safety belt will fit them properly (usually when the child is 4'9" tall, 10 – 12 years old). You MUST have a lap/shoulder belt to use a booster seat.
- Once children outgrow their booster seat (usually at 4'9", 10 – 12 years), they can use the adult lap/shoulder safety belt if it fits them properly.
- Strap the lap portion low over the hips/tops of thighs so shoulder belt crosses the center of the shoulder and center of the chest.
- Children are better protected the longer they can stay in each phase. Keep children in each seat up to the maximum age/weight/height limits before moving to the next phase.
- If driving your kids to school, don't double park; it blocks visibility for other children and vehicles.
- Don't load or unload children across the street from the school.
- Carpool to reduce the number of vehicles at the school.



Teen Drivers:

Minors under 18 years of age who obtain their provisional license are restricted from the following for 12 months after issuance:

- Driving with more than one passenger under the age of 21 who is not a family member.
- Driving between midnight and 5AM unless school or work related activities require it or for medical emergencies.
- Individuals who are under 18 years of age and obtained their driver's license on or after September 1, 2009 are restricted from using a wireless communication device, including a hands-free device, until they reach the age of 18, except in the case of an emergency.

Whichever mode of transportation you choose, *Be Safe and Be Aware of your surroundings.* Talk to your child about personal safety:

- Stay in well-lit areas and NEVER talk to strangers nor take rides offered.
- Walking/biking alone can be unsafe, have a friend with you.
- Familiarize your child with the neighborhood – show them the safe places they can go if they need help, such as the fire station, police station, trusted stores, or business offices. Teach them to report suspicious people to you, teachers, police officers or responsible adults.
- Be sure your child knows your home address and number along with the phone number of another trusted adult.
- Let your child know who their emergency contacts are and who is authorized to pick them up from school. Have your child check with a school official if someone known and familiar attempts to pick them up from school but is not on the authorized list.
- Practice walking to school or to the bus stop and riding a bike before the first day of school. The practice will help you feel at ease on the first day of school and your child to feel comfortable and confident. If possible follow the routine the first couple of days.
- The first day of school in particular is a very confusing and hectic day for all.
- If your child is approached or followed by a suspicious person or vehicle:
 - **Scream**
 - **Run away in the opposite direction**
 - **Run to a safe place/location**
 - **Call 911**

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Home alone:

If you plan on allowing your child to stay home alone after school, consider the following for the youngest child that will be left alone:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests 11-12 year olds should not come home to an empty house unless they show unusual maturity for their age.
- How old, emotional mature, and capable is your child?
- Do they generally make good decisions?
- Is the home environment a safe one?
- Does your child have basic first-aid knowledge?
- Are there hazards or risks in the neighborhood?
- What is your child's ability to respond to illness, fire, weather, or other types of emergencies?
- How does your child generally handle unexpected situations?
- Does your child have a mental, physical, or emotional disability?
- Do they know where you are and do they have the knowledge and means to contact you?
- Do they have other responsible adults they can contact if you are not available?
- How long will they be left alone?

If after reviewing the above you feel comfortable leaving your child home alone, consider the following:

- Have your child contact you as soon as they arrive at home.
- What will they have for a snack? Are they allowed to use appliances?
- Set rules for going outside, using the computer, having friends over, screen time, etc.
- Create a schedule for your child so they know what to expect.
- Utilize parental controls on computers and televisions.
- Secure items that pose potential dangers such as firearms, alcohol, prescription drugs, over the counter drugs, car keys, lighters, ect.
- Is there a neighbor you trust to check in on your child?
- Have a practice run and start with leaving them for short periods of time and work your way up.
- Lock all windows and doors.
- Write down the home address as well as emergency numbers such as 911 and poison control.



Hiring a sitter:

- Is the sitter old enough to care for your child? Consider their experience caring for children your child's age.
- Call their references.
- Listen to your child if they disclose disapproval of the sitter or feel uncomfortable with the sitter.
- Check databases for criminal history including the National Sex Offender registry.
- Discuss discipline and expectations.
- Leave a list of emergency contacts in the event that you are unreachable.



Using a commercial after-school program:

If you choose to enroll your child in an afterschool program, consider the following.

- What is the staff-to-child ratio?
- What is the program doing to reduce the risk of bullying and abuse?
- What type of training is required by staff? Any pertaining to bullying and abuse prevention?
- What is their discipline policy for staff misconduct as well as children?
- How will your child be supervised?
- Request to see the schedule and ask questions if something is unfamiliar.
- Search online for reviews and talk to other parents that have used the same company.
- Are they licensed by the state?

If you find a program that you feel comfortable with, talk to your kids about personal safety, boundaries, acceptable & unacceptable behaviors, discuss possible scenarios and how to respond.