

Baristanet

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Walking to School Alone: What's the Right Age?

With the gorgeous weather we've been having, you see more kids walking, or biking, to school. It's likely that you walked to school alone at a young age (I started in 2nd grade) but parents these days (myself included) don't feel comfortable letting our kids out alone in the world. Just when is the right time for kids to start walking to school alone? Is there a perfect age or is it more about maturity?

Dr. Sara Goldstein, an associate professor in [Family and Child Studies at Montclair State University](#) and an expert in Developmental Psychology, offers the following advice to parents regarding when to allow your children to walk to school alone:

Many factors need to be taken into consideration before parents should allow their child to walk to school independently.

- 1) To begin, ask this question – does the child WANT to walk to school by him or herself – or is your child bringing up the topic because of what the friends are doing? Or because other parents are allowing it.
- 2) Then, if your child wants to walk alone, determine the developmental status of the child, including age, cognitive, emotional and social maturity, with these guidelines:
 - can the child follow instructions?
 - does the child have good impulse control?
 - does the child know the route to and from the school?
 - does the child cross streets safely?
 - does the child know how to spot and avoid dangerous situations?
- 3) Parents also need to consider the characteristics of the neighborhood through which the child would be walking:
 - are there major streets to cross?
 - what is the distance to the school?
 - does the child live in a high-crime neighborhood?
 - what's the social support there crossing guards at major intersections?
 - does the child know other families on the way to school? other children?
 - are there stores or shops along the route that can be safe havens if the child needs an adult for help
 - can a child to pair up with another child or group of children at first, before parents let him or her walk independently.

- 4) Above all – safety should come first and foremost. Dr. Goldstein advises parents that if they are not confident that their child will arrive safely, put it off for a few months and then evaluate the situation again.
- 5) When you believe that a child is ready to go....then:
- go on practice walks with the child where the child leads the way (before letting them walk by themselves)
 - draw out a map with familiar land marks to give to the child on the day of the first independent walk
 - make sure the child has a way to quickly contact you if they get lost or scared

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