

HAVING FUN: Ideas to Generate Children's Enthusiasm

Walking to school is a way for children to learn about the environment, their health, and their safety. You can encourage this learning by incorporating fun activities into the journey to and from school. When selecting activities, keep in mind the ages and maturity levels of students in the group. Some suggested activities follow.

Traffic Cops

Give children small spiral notepads to record traffic and pedestrian violations they see as they walk to school, such as cars not coming to a complete stop at stop signs, drivers not using their signal when turning or changing lanes, and jay walking. Kids can also carry signs with smiling faces to point at good drivers. This activity helps children become alert pedestrians and more pedestrian-conscious drivers when they, too, are operating an automobile.

Environmental Inspectors

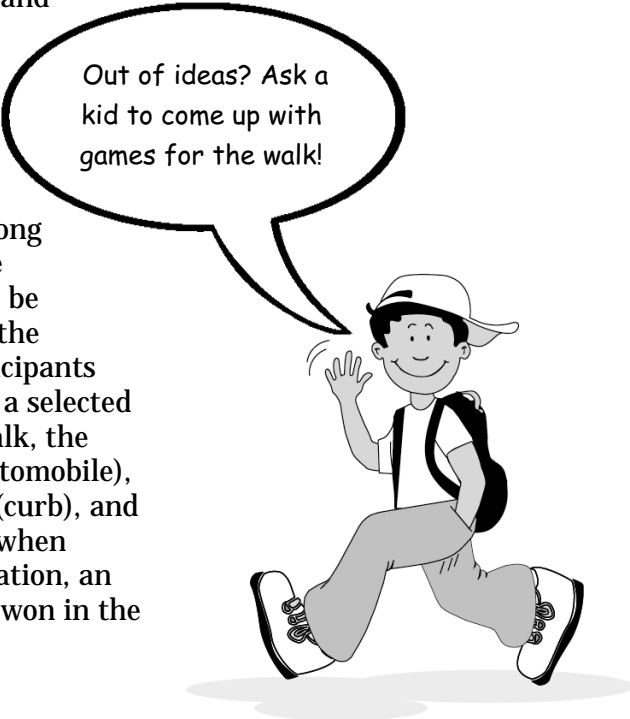
Give children grocery bags to fill with trash they find along the route to school. When you play Environmental Inspectors, it is necessary to warn children about picking up dangerous trash, such as needles and glass. You may want to provide children with gloves when they are picking up debris.

Eye Spy

Allow children to pick an Eye Spy theme for the walk to and from school. Examples are Eye Spy safe things, Eye Spy dangerous things, Eye Spy things that pollute, and Eye Spy things that promote physical activity.

Theme Days

Children and adults can come up with themes that go along with each day of the week. For example, Mondays can be "yellow day" when everyone wears yellow; Tuesdays can be "say day" when everyone tries not to say a chosen word the whole trip; Wednesdays can be "rhyme time" when participants say as many words as they can think of that rhyme with a selected word; Thursdays can be "alphabet day" when as they walk, the children must find something that starts with an 'A' (automobile), then something that starts with a 'B' (bicycle), then 'C' (curb), and so on, in alphabetical order; Fridays can be "story day," when children take turns describing their favorite book or vacation, an embarrassing moment, or how they would spend money won in the lottery.



Out of ideas? Ask a kid to come up with games for the walk!

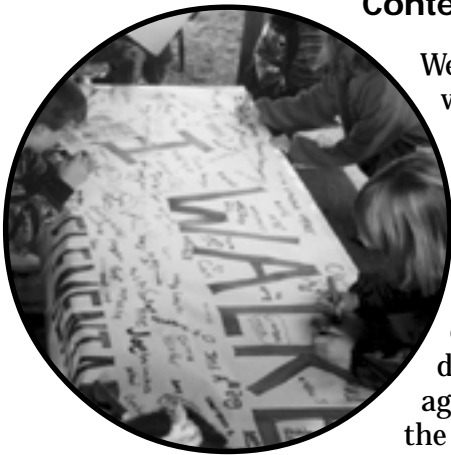
Pollution Stoppers

Have the children calculate how much they are reducing pollution by walking and bicycling to and from school. The Environmental Defense Fund has a great pollution calculator on the Internet (www.edf.org/programs/ppa/vlc/driving_practices.html). Kids can make a big thermometer to track how much they are decreasing pollution.

Journal Writing

Encourage children to keep a journal. Children might enjoy documenting their personal experiences during their walking or bicycling adventures. They can record events that occur, conversations had, friendships formed, and animals seen.

Contests



Children in Boulder, Colorado, sign their names on the "I Walked" banner.

Weekly or monthly contests are a great way to get children to walk to and from school. One idea is to have children record how many miles they have walked in a week or month. These miles can include destinations other than school. The child who has walked the most or a certain amount each week or month wins a prize or privilege.

If there are children who are unable to participate in the contest because they are disabled or live in areas where it is too dangerous to walk, it may be better to have classes compete against each other instead of individuals. Entire classes can record the number of miles they walked or biked to school and other destinations, and the class that goes the farthest can win a prize.

Classroom Involvement

Teachers at school can involve their students in the KidsWalk-to-School program by planning student inspections of the school grounds for unsafe paths or areas. Students can record the unsafe areas and discuss ways to improve the identified hazards.

- Students can write letters to their school officials, police department, or the transportation department to ask them to address these hazards.
- Mapping areas that need improvement and need safe walking paths can be very helpful. The map created can be used to inform local authorities about areas of need, and is also a great tool for teaching children about mapping skills.
- Geography classes can draw maps of walking routes and surrounding areas; biology classes can use walks as an opportunity to pick up leaves and seed pods; average walking distances, speeds, or mileage totals can be calculated in math classes; and for English classes, poetry or stories can be composed or recited during the walks.

Such involvement can add acceptance and permanence to your KidsWalk-to-School program.

Young Mentors

Older kids can be mentors to younger kids. Invite middle, high school, or college students to take part in planning and developing your KidsWalk-to-School program. Younger kids typically look up to older kids and are more likely to be excited about a project when they are involved.

Students in a health and physical education course at Virginia Tech helped plan the Walk Our Children to School Day Event in Blacksburg, Virginia, as part of a class project. Approximately 80 college students turned out to walk with the children. Fifty of the students were athletes who played on various teams at Virginia Tech.



Members of the Virginia Tech women's lacrosse team walk to school with children from Margaret Beeks Elementary School, Blacksburg, Virginia.

