

## **Reduce, Reuse, and Walk**

Walking to school has many benefits all on its own. Some schools however, have put a new spin on the daily trek. Themed walks are not only a way to revitalize a routine but a way to get one started. Encouraging children to walk to school is ultimately encouraging fewer parents to drive them. This *reduces* the congestion at school drop off and pickup locations. When there is less congestion there is less of an opportunity for children to interact with moving vehicles.

A school in Ireland has taken advantage of the themed walking day idea by incorporating several different themes throughout the year. In November the school held a Welly Walk, where the children decorated their wellies by painting fish, pirate ships and Christmas decorations on them. Wellies are the Irish reference to rain boots. This was a great way to *reuse* old decorations or craft supplies. In Oregon with Spring time weather upon us there are many opportunities to break out the rain boots. Additionally, another environmentally minded theme that was done by the same school was carbon-saving day. Everyone walked with a red balloon in hand that read CO<sub>2</sub> on it. The children were promoting the fact that by walking they were decreasing their carbon footprint.

With all these innovative ways to walk to school it is important to keep safety in mind. Children see traffic and other obstacles differently, so it is a necessity to educate children on how to safely make their way to school. In order to educate properly it is vital to understand children's limitations when it comes to traffic.

Specifically children:

- Have a narrower field of vision, about 1/3 less than adults
- Cannot judge speed and distance
- Assume if they can see the car they; the driver can see them
- Cannot readily tell the direction a sound is coming from
- May be impatient and impulsive
- Concentrate on only one thing at a time

Ways in which one can combat these obstacles include:

-Gauge your child's ability to handle independence. Maybe he or she is not quite ready to make the trek to school entirely on their own. Walking in groups is a good way to solve this problem. Parents can take turns leading the pack. Also if there are not other kids to team up with; walk part of the way with your child. Maybe you can stop at the end of the block before school. This way you could still see them, but they have a few moments to experience the responsibility of independence.

-Practice with your child. Make the walk to school together a few times and point out things that they need to watch out for. These trial runs are a good time to evaluate how much your child is ready for. Practicing safe pedestrian behavior does not have to occur just on the walk to school either. Use the parking lot on the way into the grocery store as a time to stop and cross safely. Make an effort to show the child the importance of making eye contact with the driver. One never knows if the driver is stopping for you or they are looking at something else. Eye contact solidifies that they have seen you.

-Repeat what you have reviewed. Quiz your child on different scenarios and things that you have gone over. This is a great way to gauge your child's level of ability when becoming a solo pedestrian. This is also a way to pinpoint areas that could use a little more practice. All this gauging, practicing, and repeating ultimately forms habits for the child; when something becomes a habit it less for them to focus on.

We would like to hear how schools throughout Oregon are encouraging their students to walk or bike to school. Send us your pictures and stories so we can highlight your successes in this newsletter.