

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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This Guide is intended as a resource for individuals or groups wishing to encourage healthier and safer lifestyles in their children by implementing ASRTS programming in their communities. Typically these stakeholders include:

- School boards/districts
- Municipal transportation engineering and planning staff
- Police divisions
- Public Health Units
- Politicians and municipal councils
- School Principals
- Parent councils
- Teachers
- Other community organizations that have a stake in the safe travel of children to and from school

This Guide is the result of six years of experience in Ontario on implementing the ASRTS program, working with 1,000 schools in over 20 communities across the Province.

There are six distinct components in the ASRTS program:

1. International Walk to School Day
2. Walking Challenge / Kilometre Club
3. Neighbourhood Walkabout
4. No Idling at School
5. Walking School Bus
6. Classroom Mapping - Blazing Trails through the Urban Jungle



The ASRTS Guide provides information and tools to help you implement some or all of these components in your school or community, with suggested timelines throughout the year. The success of the ASRTS program lies in its flexibility. It may not be feasible for your school to implement all of these components. Select which are right for you.

Active and Safe Routes to School Through the Year

June

Celebrate a successful year of ASRTS on **Clean Air Day**.

Introduce **Blazing Trails** classroom mapping to teachers in the spring so that it can be worked into the curriculum for next year

Kick off **Summer Active** on Sneaker Day.

Begin planning a **Walking School Bus** program for next year. Families who live on the same block/apartment building can walk in groups for safety.

May

Earth Day Celebrations. This is an opportunity to explore transportation choices and the environment.

September

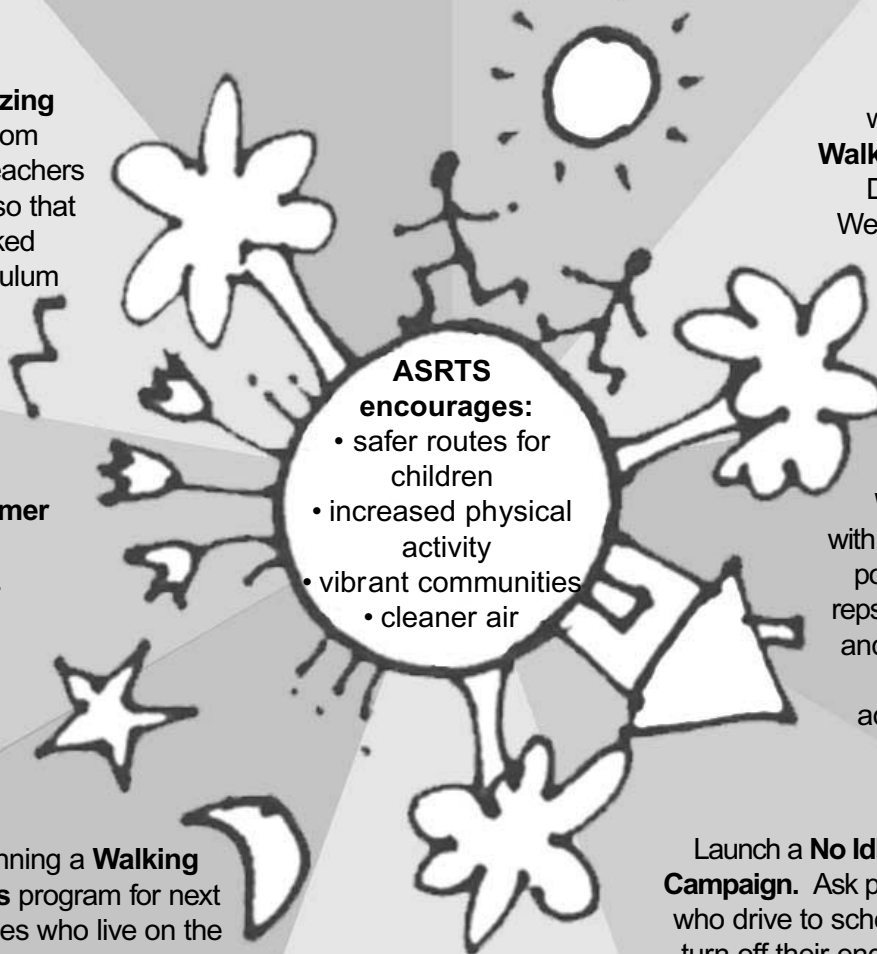
Participate in **International Walk to School Day**.

Encourage a weekly or monthly **Walking Wednesday**. Designate the first Wednesday of every month as a Walk to School Day.

Organize a **Neighbourhood Walkabout**. Meet with parents, principal, police, school board reps., local councillors and traffic engineers to examine and address the school safety issues.

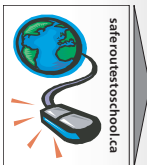
March

Launch a **No Idling Campaign**. Ask parents who drive to school to turn off their engines while waiting.



ASRTS encourages:

- safer routes for children
- increased physical activity
- vibrant communities
- cleaner air



10 Good Reasons to Walk to School Together:

- It's fun
- It's healthy
- It's non-polluting
- It's a great way to meet new friends
- It reduces stress
- It's a chance to teach and learn road safety skills
- It's considerate
- It's educational
- It's economical
- It's a way to make streets safer



PRAISE FOR THE ASRTS RESOURCE GUIDE

"It's great to have the facts and figures to support our campaign to get parents out of their cars."

Physical Education Teacher, Brampton, Ontario

"You have put together a fabulous program that is obviously benefiting the community and the children. The press loves delivering your messages and so others benefit from the exposure you get in the community. Keep up the terrific work! You are making a difference."

Transportation Planner, City of Waterloo, Ontario

"Thanks. You have been an inspiration to us. Your program is unique in the extent of its attention to environmental issues (clean air, etc.)."

Public Health Professional, California, U.S.A.

"This resource guide was instrumental in the development of our ASRTS program."

SAGE, Winnipeg, Manitoba

"The whole resource was very useful. We may be separated by an ocean and a common language but we both speak from the same song sheet."

Safe Routes to School, Dorset, England

"The section on setting up Walking School Buses was so good that I loaned the resource guide to someone and never got it back!"

WalkBoston, Jamaica Plain, U.S.A.



CAR TRAVEL: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT. SOME USEFUL THINGS TO KNOW

Walking, getting some

*Exercise, healthy,
energizing,*

*Breathing fresh air,
riding*

*A bike, TV cameras,
happy,*

*Awesome, no cars,
taking*

*Pictures, exciting,
walking*

*With friends, giving a
cheer,*

*Fun, water bottles
going home*

Walk to School Day!

Grades 3 / 4 classes,
Echo Place Public
School, Brantford



The Car Crisis

Nearly six million young Canadians aged five to 19 years (nearly a quarter of the population) use non-active modes of transportation to get to school each day.¹ In Canada less than one-third of students walk or cycle to school²; in the U.S. less than 15% of students walk to school regularly³ and in the UK only one child in nine travels unaccompanied by adults⁴. As many as seven daily car trips in North America are for distances as short as three kilometers, or less.⁵ Walking or cycling to and from school could eliminate four of these short daily trips.

While cars seem to be our preferred mode of transportation due to their perceived convenience and safety, they are actually proving to be a threat to children's overall well-being. Every parent who drives their child to school adds one more vehicle to already congested roads, while removing their eyes from the street. With fewer parents monitoring their sidewalks, children who do have to walk to school alone are left even more vulnerable to the dangers of traffic, bullying, harassment and abduction. Twenty per cent of Canadian parents who don't feel safe about letting their children walk to school say they would let them do it if it was safe. Many of them don't seem to realize that the solution is in their hands.

Reduced Freedom For Our Children

Opportunities and locations for safe and spontaneous play in our neighborhoods have become severely restricted. Many of today's children cannot move about their neighbourhoods on their own due to increased traffic on our roads and concerns for their safety. Add to this the fact that children today spend up to 80 minutes a day⁶ – or an average of 20 hours per week – watching television and playing computer games at home,⁷ and you have a large number of children with little or no opportunity to get to know their neighbourhoods through unstructured play.

Learning Road Sense

Younger children who walk to school with a parent or caregiver have the chance to build up their road sense over time, making them better prepared for independent journeys as they get older.⁸

The Air We Breathe

More cars on our roads also means more pollution in the air we breathe. In fact, most North Americans are struggling with a steady rise in air pollution in or around large urban centres. Although gains have been made in fuel efficiency since the 1970s, which could have led to fewer emissions, they have unfortunately been offset by urban sprawl and larger cars.⁹

The Ontario Medical Association (OMA) is so concerned about the rising levels of air pollution that it has declared urban smog a health crisis.¹⁰ If the government does not begin to address this problem, the OMA suggests that the burden to our health care system could soon become unmanageable. In Ontario, smog is already a contributing factor to 1,920 premature deaths annually, 9,800 hospital admissions and 13,000 emergency room visits.¹¹ This accounts for approximately 47 million lost work days, which translates to \$566 million in economic losses, plus a health-care price tag of \$630 million.¹²

Smaller Lungs, But Larger Impacts

Although our economy suffers large losses due to smog, our children may be the most affected by air pollution. Per pound of body weight, children breathe three times more air than adults do, and therefore three times more pollution too.¹³ Asthma has become one of the most prevalent childhood respiratory diseases, with incidents doubling in the past decade. In Canada, asthma has become the leading cause of hospital admissions and school absenteeism.¹⁴ In fact, there is a direct correlation between children's modes of travel to and from school, air pollution and their health.

Previously it was recognized that smog triggers attacks in asthmatics but now researchers in California have discovered that smog may cause asthma in young people who did not previously have the disease.¹⁵ In fact, air pollution is the number one trigger of asthmatic reactions.¹⁶ Smog levels tend to be worse in the late afternoon, precisely when driving parents accumulate around the schoolyard. The glut of idling engines causes a bubble of smog that engulfs the school, into which rush excited and active children at the sound of the school bell.

Toxins In Our Cars

Still another compelling reason to decrease car use is that levels of toxins and other pollutants are higher inside vehicles than outside; as much as one half of the pollutants inside cars may be emitted by the vehicle ahead.¹⁷



The Environment

Reducing our car use has positive global environmental impacts. Transportation creates approximately 30% of Canada's emissions of carbon dioxide¹⁸, a powerful greenhouse gas. If current trends continue, projections show a 40% increase in fuel consumption for transportation over the next 25 years¹⁹. Hefty energy consumption has made North America the world leader in global-warming-causing emissions of greenhouse gases. In 1998, the continent accounted for 25.8% of global emissions of carbon dioxide, a leading greenhouse gas. Today North America's per capita annual gasoline consumption for motor vehicles is nine times the world average²⁰. Eliminating just four short trips a week of 1 kilometre each can reduce emissions of up to 100 kg of carbon dioxide per year.²¹ Families that participate in active transportation, like a Walking School Bus, can prevent almost 1,000 kg of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere, and save money in fuel costs as well!²²

WALK, DON'T RUN

It's simple, it's cheap, and studies show that walking may be the best exercise for reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

The elements of a healthy workout: 30 minutes of brisk walking five or six times per week.



Through walking just one mile in 20 minutes, it is possible to use up as much energy as:

- Running a mile in 10 minutes
- Swimming breast stroke for 10 minutes
- Cycling for 16 minutes
- Doing aerobics for 16 minutes

Improved Health Through Increased Physical Activity

Fifty-seven per cent of Canadian young people are so sedentary that they are harming their health, and only 38% of Canadian girls and 48% of boys are active enough for it to benefit their health.²³ Daily physical activity can help to build and maintain healthy bones and muscles, boost cardiovascular fitness, maintain a healthy weight and lead to more energy. Walking or cycling to school is a great way to increase children's physical fitness.

Better Performance In School

As well, high grades and performance on cognitive measures are consistently associated with children who are more active. Most parents would strongly agree that physical activity helps their children's growth and development, builds self-esteem, helps with concentration and improves learning. In the UK, nine out of 10 teachers consider that the walk to school actually makes children brighter, more alert and ready for the first class of the day.²⁴ A direct link has also been made between people who exercise and improved interpersonal relationships, as well as reduced incidence of depression, anxiety and fatigue.²⁵

Noise Pollution

Driving our children to school impacts our children in other ways as well. For example, road traffic is the main cause of human exposure to ambient noise. Noise can interfere with mental activities requiring attention, memory and the ability to deal with complex analytical problems.²⁶ The strategies required to tune out or ignore noise and the efforts needed to maintain performance have been associated with high levels of stress hormones and blood pressure. There is also emerging evidence of an association between hypertension, ischaemic heart disease and high levels of noise. Although many of our schools are situated in the center of communities on quiet streets, some are adjacent to major thoroughfares.²⁷

