



*The best way of teaching safe walking and cycling skills to children – especially children with learning difficulties – is at the roadside*

DIGITALNATION/PHOTOFUSION

# Rules of the road

**E**VERY 18 minutes a child is killed or injured on the road in Britain and children with special educational needs are at especially high risk.

Road Safety Week this year (November 5-11) is focusing on child pedestrian and cyclist safety. Campaigners say schools should be playing a bigger part in teaching children about road safety.

Some schools are taking the lead in making their communities safer for children by improving routes to school, setting up ‘walking buses’ and campaigning for lower speed limits and more pedestrian-friendly environments.

**I**n 2005 30 children under 12 were killed while on foot and more than 1,000 were seriously injured. The UK’s overall child pedestrian death rate is the fourth highest in western Europe – a child in Britain is over seven times more likely to be killed on the roads than in Finland and more than three times as likely as in Italy or the Netherlands.

Children with learning difficulties are more at risk of road accidents and need careful training in road

## Road Safety Week this year will focus on child safety – a particular problem for those with learning difficulties

safety. Every child is different of course – and each child needs training which addresses their individual situation.

■ Children with autistic spectrum disorders, for example, may be distracted while crossing the road and may have trouble learning road safety routines, or applying them flexibly in different situations.

■ Children with attention deficit disorders may be impulsive and more likely to take risks or suddenly run into the road.

■ Dyspraxic children may be more likely to stumble or fall while crossing the road or cycling and may have more trouble judging distances.

The best way of teaching safe walking and cycling skills to children – especially children with learning difficulties – is at the roadside, says the road safety charity Brake. This also means you can teach children

to manage risks they actually face in their everyday lives, or will face when they change school.

Lessons need to be adapted to suit the child’s needs. Brake advises talking to parents and carers, both because they can give you valuable information about the child and because you will be reinforcing the idea that road safety training is important. Find out how the child uses roads and what risks they feel he or she faces or might face in the future.

**B**rake has produced a guide to teaching road safety to children with learning and behavioural difficulties. It has useful pointers to some of the things you need to remember. For example, most children will understand if you say: “You should always stop and look and listen for traffic before crossing the road. If you don’t, a car could hurt or even kill you.”

But some autistic children may take your words literally and believe they will be safe as long as they stop, look and listen. For them, you need to include the final step in the process: “Only cross if there are no vehicles coming”.

■ [www.roadsafetyweek.org.uk](http://www.roadsafetyweek.org.uk)