

Teaching safety skills

Safety skills are essential for a young person to be safe in day-to-day life, particularly when going out in the community. These are skills that the young person needs to have, even if additional support is required from others when completing them.

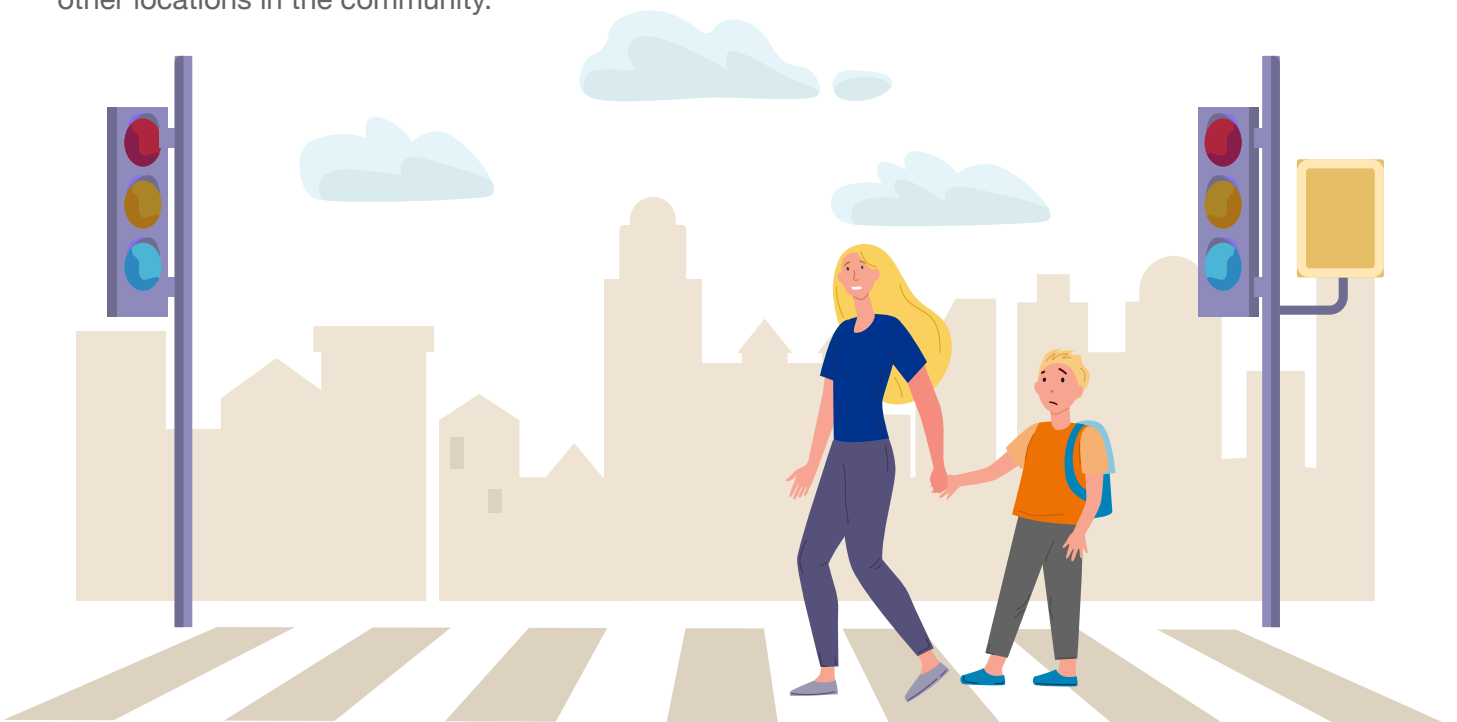
These skills are not focused on the person being able to do things independently, rather for them to be able to be supported effectively and safely, for example walking outside to go to a shop.

Why are they important?

Without these basic safety skills, the young person's capacity to access activities and locations outside is significantly limited. For example, if a young person is unable to walk alongside someone else or stop when asked to stop at a road, to be able to wait to cross a road, or to stand in a queue – this would all severely impact how they can safely access shops or other locations in the community.

Examples of safety skills

A safety skill is something which, if the young person cannot do it, would put them at risk of harm or present a significant barrier to them. This might include responding to their name being called and then following an instruction (e.g., “Bob, can you come here,” “Jane, step back”). It may include responding when asked to stop, for example at a road crossing. Another example would be waiting somewhere when asked (e.g., “can you wait here while I go to the toilet”, “wait with me while I pay for this”). Another would be asking them to walk with you, staying close by without wandering away. Finally, being able to respond to being asked to ‘stop,’ for example before touching something hot, or before crossing a road. If a young person cannot do these skills, they are potentially at risk of harm in the community, and this limits them being able to go out and do activities with support.



Simple ideas to work on at home

- You might ask your child to 'stop' when they are doing safe activities such as colouring. Give lots of social praise if they do so or guide them to respond if they do not. You could also teach 'stop' in a fun and playful way, for example, by creating green, amber, and red traffic signs and practicing stop/get ready/go with toy trains, or toy cars. This can be supportive when teaching road safety. See our factsheet on 'Road Safety' for other ways to support.
- Present information using visuals as much as you can. Use visual stories to go through particular scenarios. For more information on visual stories (how to write them and an example story) visit our website.
- Ask your child to 'wait' next to you while you get an item from a cupboard/ fridge without walking away. If they walk away, ask them to come back and try again. Over time you can gradually increase the time that they have to wait.
- Ask your child to walk with you as you move from room to room, if they stop or wander away, prompt them back to you. If they walk with you and stay next to you, give social praise. Over time extend how long they walk alongside you.

Remember:

It is important to practise these skills in a safe environment (for example - walk with me while at home, responding to 'stop' when doing safe activities, waiting in a safe environment). It is also important to ensure they can do it with different people and in various places. For example, can they respond to 'stop' when a carer asks, when a teacher asks and can they do it at home, at school and at the park.

Tips for improving safety skills:

Speak with your child's nursery, school or college about safe skills, and what opportunities they can have to learn these.

Share with your school what you are working on at home and look for opportunities to practise safety skills.

Embed the teaching of safety skills in whatever you are doing and look for opportunity to generalise skills already acquired.

References:

McGreevy, P., Fry, T. and Cornwall, C. (2014). Essential for Living: a communication, behavior and functional skills assessment, curriculum and teaching manual for children and adults with moderate-to-severe disabilities. Winter Park, FL: Patrick McGreevy, Ph. D., P.A.