

Some aspects of the physical and mental development of young children aren't present sufficiently to enable them to cross the road safely on their own. The table below sets out these limitations and demonstrates what we can do to improve the skills they need whilst still protecting them from dangers they are yet unable to recognise for themselves. It is important to consider these limitations to ensure that the road safety messages being taught are appropriate for their age and capability.

Physical

Vision

This is not fully developed until someone is 16 years old. They have poor peripheral vision. Changing focus is slow, for example they may trip up on the kerb because they have been looking into the distance for traffic. It is better developed by the time they are eight.

Putting into practice

Encourage children to turn their head and look for specific things in the near, middle and far distances.

Hearing

As with vision, development of the auditory function is a long process. They may be able to 'hear a pin drop' but often difficult for them, and they do not hear the full range of sounds. They have difficulty distinguishing between individual sounds and may prioritise them by how exciting, loud or unusual they are, for example a helicopter overhead may attract their attention more than a vehicle approaching.

Putting into practice

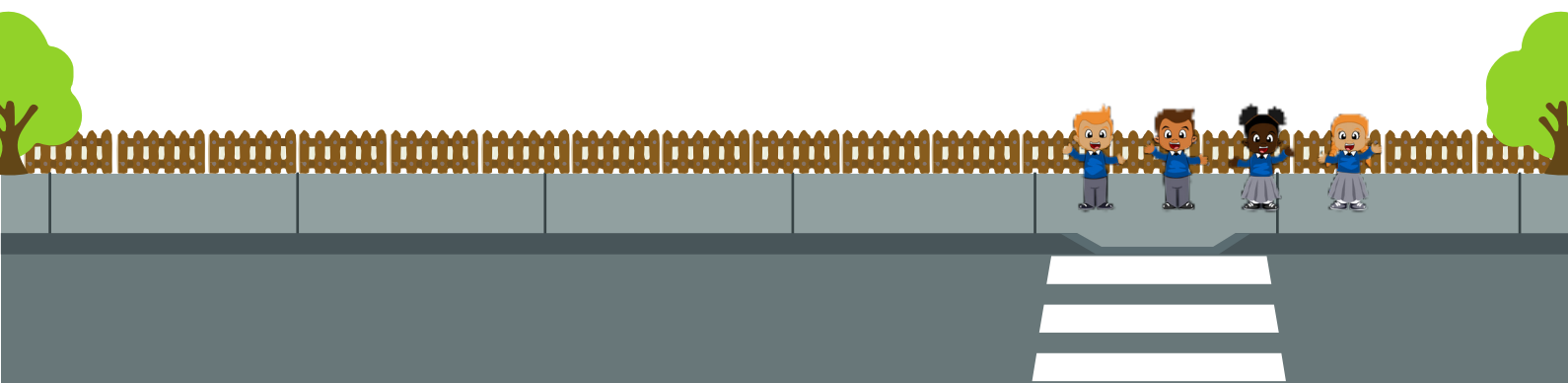
Encourage the child to identify different traffic sounds. Listen to the different volumes of sound that traffic makes in the distance and as it gets closer. Try to identify the vehicle from the sound it makes.

Coordination

Young children may trip over because their coordination is not fully developed. They also find it difficult to focus on more than one thing at a time.

Putting into practice

Encourage the child to always walk when near the road and especially when crossing. Do not let them run on ahead. Always walk straight across the road, looking and listening all the time.



Social

Peer group pressure

Children may copy their friends and behave in an unsafe way when they are near roads, eg pushing and shoving. As they get older this behaviour can lead to increased risk taking.

Putting into practice

Allow the child to make decisions but supervise them so that a 'wrong' decision can be corrected before they act on it. Discuss the possible consequences of irresponsible and unsafe behaviour.

Emotional

Immaturity

Children can act impulsively, often they do not stop and think first, and they may be absorbed in a fantasy world. Their concentration is easily broken.

Putting into practice

Protect young children by always holding hands when on or near a road (or training them to hold on to your bag, coat or pram if your hands aren't free). Talk about the things that you can see and hear whilst walking, to help them concentrate.

Intellectual

Short-term memory is poor

Children quickly forget the view from one side once they have turned their head to look in the other direction. Children have difficulty scanning the road, which they see in a series of snapshots.

Putting into practice

Practise looking together and ask the child to help you make the decision on when it is safe to cross. This can help them develop the skills required to extend their memory.

Perception

Children find it difficult to judge speed, time and distance. They often wrongly associate speed and distance with the size of vehicles, for example a lorry is slow and near, a motorbike is fast and far away. This improves with experience.

Putting into practice

Education in the real road environment will help. Talking about the reasons for your decisions helps children with them in their own decision-making process.

