

Areas of Child Development

There are aspects of both the physical and mental development of young children that aren't present sufficiently to enable them to cross the road safely on their own. The table below sets out these limitations and demonstrates that there is much we can do to improve the skills they need whilst still protecting them from dangers they are yet 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 16 years of age! They have poor peripheral vision. Changing focus is slow e.g. They may trip up on the kerb because they have been looking into the distance for traffic. It is better developed by 8 years.	Encourage the child 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 locating the direction of the sound is difficult. They do not hear the full range of sounds. They have difficulty distinguishing individual sounds and may prioritise them by how exciting, loud or unusual they are e.g. a helicopter overhead may attract their attention more than the vehicle approaching!	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
Co-ordination Young children may trip over because their co-ordination is not fully developed. They also find it difficult to do more than one thing at a time.	Encourage the child to walk always, 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 i.e. pushing and shoving etc. As they get older this behaviour can lead to increased risk taking.	Allow the child to make decisions but supervise them so 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 do not stop and think first, and may be absorbed in a fantasy world. Their concentration is easily broken.	Protect young children by always holding hands (or training them to hold onto your bag, coat, pram if hands aren't free). Talk about the things that you see and hear whilst walking, to help them concentrate.
INTELLECTUAL	
Short term memory is poor. The view from one side is quickly forgotten once they have turned their head to look in the other direction. They have difficulty 'scanning' - the road is seen in a series of 'snapshots'	Practice looking together and ask them to help you make the decision as to when to cross. This can develop the skills required to extend their memory.
Perception Children have difficulty in judging speed, time and distance. They often wrongly associate speed and distance with the size of vehicles e.g. lorry/slow/near, motorbikes/fast/ far away. This improves with experience.	Education in the real road environment will help. Talking about the reasons for your decisions helps in their decision-making process.