



School is finished for the day. Elementary school students dash through a heavy downpour. Traffic is congested as parents arrive from all directions to get to their children. Some beckon from across the street, others double park, blocking traffic. In the midst of the chaos, school buses try to leave the school grounds.

In today's fast paced society, children are often exposed to traffic situations that increase their risk of being involved in an accident. Without realizing it, parents (like those in the above mentioned scenario) can add to these dangers.

Heavy traffic and child pedestrians do not mix. Driving youngsters to or from school or bus stops creates traffic congestion in a limited space.

This situation endangers lives.

Stating The Issue

Besides causing needless traffic congestion, parents often double park or stop on crosswalks, blocking visibility for children and other motorists. Visibility is further reduced during rain or snow for both drivers and pedestrians and when windows fog over from condensation. When drivers and youngsters cannot see each other, accidents are more likely to occur.

Frequently, parents load or unload their children across from the school or bus stop. Youngsters, faced with all the hazards mentioned above, must then cross a busy street to reach their destination. Or, children may open a car door on the wrong side of the car and dash directly into the path of an oncoming car.

Parents occasionally stop in moving traffic, expecting their children to get out and scramble to the sidewalk or bus or run across busy streets. Such actions cause accidents. Most occur on rainy or snowy days when more parents than usual drive their children to school.

Bad weather isn't always the culprit. Negligent parental behaviour also can cause accidents. Sometimes parents deliberately block the path of a school bus to keep their children from missing the bus. Some parents even drive beside a bus, tooting the car horn and waving frantically for the driver to stop. In most cases, they want to deliver a forgotten school lunch.

What Can Be Done

To avoid these dangerous traffic situations, parents should make a real effort not to drive their children to school or to the bus stop.

Walking is good for children and can increase their self-reliance and sense of responsibility. A well-organized morning that allows enough time for children to walk to school or the bus stop begins the day on a positive tone for everyone - children, parents and teachers.

With warm clothing for cold days and proper rain gear for wet days, children can walk safely to and from the school in bad weather.

It also encourages safe behaviour.

When your children begin school, walk with him or her to the building or the bus stop several times. Use these walks to:

- Point out possible traffic hazards
- Establish safe walking routes
- Designate the safest walking route

With your help, children can become confident and capable of handling various traffic situations along their walking route.

If you walk to meet your children, take extra care. Young children are easily distracted; when excited, they may dash across the street to meet you without looking first. To avoid this risk, try to be at the school when it lets out - and always approach on the school side of the street.