

# Teaching road safety skills to children with additional needs



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviours of concern</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Supporting children with additional needs</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Teaching road safety skills</b>	<b>8</b>
ADHD and ADD	9
Autism	9
Dyspraxia	10
Dyslexia	10
<b>What to teach</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Teaching aids</b>	<b>12</b>
Social stories	12
Visual aids	13
Toys and games	15
Safety equipment	15



## Introduction

As a parent or carer, you play a vital role in teaching your child road safety skills. Children often mimic the behaviour of their parents or carers, and therefore it is important that you behave safely on the road, be it as a pedestrian, cyclist or driver and display positive attitudes towards road safety. You will also naturally have more contact with your child and so are better able to ensure that road safety skills are continually practised and reinforced.

Parents and carers of children with additional needs can feel concerned about the difficulties their child may face in learning vital road safety skills. Children are taught basic road safety skills from an early age and typically learn the skills required to keep them safe from harm relatively quickly. However, children with additional needs can face greater challenges when it comes to learning about road safety; for example, children with autism may lack awareness of danger or become easily distracted.

This guide will provide advice on teaching road safety skills to children who lack an appropriate sense of danger to keep themselves safe and help them develop awareness skills.



## Behaviours of concern

The challenges that a child with additional needs may face in learning road safety skills will vary from child to child. Below is a list of common behaviours and difficulties that your child may face.

### Attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

If your child has attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), they may display any of the following<sup>1,2</sup>:

- 👉 **Hyperactivity**, often running around excessively. This means that your child may be more likely to display behaviours such as running out into the road
- 👉 **Impulsiveness and tendency to act without thinking**, meaning that, for example, your child may be less likely to wait for the green man signal to cross the road
- 👉 **Little regard for personal safety**, meaning that your child may act without considering the consequences of their actions. They may take chances with approaching traffic
- 👉 **Appearing forgetful, with a shorter attention span and easily distracted**. Your child may become distracted when crossing the road, or simply forget to stop, look and listen. They may also find it difficult to concentrate when being taught road safety skills and become bored very quickly<sup>3</sup>
- 👉 **A tendency not to listen to others or follow instructions**, meaning that even if supervised, they may not listen to or obey the instructions of an adult.



<sup>1</sup> Brake (undated) 'Dangers of roads for children with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/563-dangers-of-roads-for-children-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>2</sup> NHS (2018) 'Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)'

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/symptoms/>

Date Accessed: 11/08/2020.

<sup>3</sup> TRL (2002) 'Review of the road safety of disabled children and adults'

<https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TRL559.pdf>



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

### Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

If your child has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), they may display any of the following<sup>4,5</sup>:

-  **Difficulty thinking and behaving flexibly** according to different situations, and a tendency to tie new skills to the circumstances in which they were taught. This means your child may not apply what they have learned to every relevant situation, so they need extra help and encouragement to generalise skills and adapt them to new situations<sup>6</sup>. For example, a child taught to use the Green Cross Code when crossing a particular road may not automatically know to apply the code to crossing other roads
-  **Difficulty understanding social contexts**, meaning that they may not respond to being taught about road safety in the context of what is right and wrong. It may also be difficult for them to apply these concepts to different situations
-  **Difficulty communicating with and understanding others**, meaning that they may find it hard to understand verbal communications from adults supervising them and may be unable to communicate any difficulties they have in keeping themselves safe. They may also take statements very literally, and remember some details of instructions without grasping the main points or the overall gist<sup>7</sup>
-  **Over- or under-sensitivity to sights and sounds**, which could pose a risk on the road if your child panics in reaction to particular noises or sights because they experience over-sensitivity, or a lack of awareness of dangers such as approaching traffic if your child experiences under-sensitivity
-  **Forgetful and easily distracted in the course of everyday activities**, meaning that they may become distracted when crossing the road, or forget to stop, look and listen
-  **Strong interests**, which can cause distractions. A child with a strong interest in cars, for example, may walk into the road if they see a car they like.




---

<sup>4</sup> Brake (undated) 'Dangers of roads for children with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/563-dangers-of-roads-for-children-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>5</sup> Clements, J. and Zarkowska, E. (2000). Behavioural concerns and autistic spectrum disorders: explanations and strategies for change. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> TRL (2002) 'Review of the road safety of disabled children and adults'

<https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TRL559.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Jones, Jordan and Morgan (2001) cited in TRL (2002) 'Review of the road safety of disabled children and adults'

<https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TRL559.pdf>



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

### Dyspraxia and developmental coordination disorder

If your child has dyspraxia or developmental coordination disorder, they may display any of the following<sup>8</sup>:

- **Coordination difficulties**, meaning that they may be at a higher risk of stumbling or falling
- **Problems judging distance**, which can make it particularly difficult for your child to judge how far away approaching traffic is and when it's safe to cross
- **Inability to tell left from right consistently**, meaning that they may find it difficult to follow the instructions of an adult when using the road or following road markings for pedestrians telling them to "look left" or "look right"
- **Problems doing two things at once or completing complex tasks**, meaning they may have difficulty following instructions with several actions, such as the Green Cross Code
- **Being slower at picking up new skills**, meaning that more repetition and encouragement may be required to help your child learn road safety skills.

### Dyslexia

If your child has dyslexia, they may display any of the following<sup>9</sup>:

- **Difficulties reading**, which can make it difficult for your child when reading any written instructions or advice on using the roads, including road signs and markings
- **Difficulties following a series of instructions in order**, meaning that your child could have difficulties following instructions when using roads, or applying a series of actions in order, such as the Green Cross Code
- **Problems with directional words**, meaning your child might find it difficult to follow instructions from you when using the roads, or obeying signs that ask them to look left or right.

---

<sup>8</sup> Brake (undated) 'Dangers of roads for children with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/563-dangers-of-roads-for-children-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>9</sup> Brake (undated) 'Dangers of roads for children with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/563-dangers-of-roads-for-children-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.



## Supporting children with additional needs

Children with additional needs, such as autism, visual or hearing impairments, or even a phobia, may engage in what can be dangerous behaviours such as running near to or into the road and be completely unaware of the risks. It is important to consider the reasons why any child has taken such dangerous action. Many young children, even those without additional needs, may not understand why they should not engage in such dangerous behaviour. Therefore, it is important to make sure that there is not anything else that is encouraging the behaviour<sup>10</sup>.

Our natural behaviour when someone is in danger is to react strongly, to make sure that they stay safe. However, the child might like being chased, or like the attention they receive. If this is the case, remember to remain calm as our natural reaction might be one of anger which could create further distress, especially for a child who has problems in understanding what they have done wrong. When moving them to safety, do so with the minimum amount of eye contact and communication. Use whatever form of communication is most appropriate to reinforce the importance that they don't go on to the road without you and if you use symbols or sign to communicate with your child, remind them using a "no running or climbing" sign or symbol<sup>11</sup>.

If your child has a tendency to run when you are out walking, it can be useful to try and provide distractions to keep their mind off running away. Some ideas for distracting your child are to point out things in the environment, sing their favourite song, or have them bring something along that they are interested in on the journey, such as a favourite toy or music player. This way, your child will also receive positive attention and interaction to prevent them from running on to the road. We all need to be reinforcing positive road safety behaviours<sup>12</sup> with our children, no matter whether they have additional needs or not.

If necessary, there is a range of different equipment available, such as pushchairs for children with additional needs.



---

<sup>10</sup> National Autistic Society (2017) 'Road safety and awareness of danger for people on the autism spectrum' [www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety](http://www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety)  
Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>11</sup> National Autistic Society (2017) 'Road safety and awareness of danger for people on the autism spectrum' [www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety](http://www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety)  
Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>12</sup> National Autistic Society (2017) 'Road safety and awareness of danger for people on the autism spectrum' [www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety](http://www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety) Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

# Teaching road safety skills

It is important when teaching road safety skills to your child, to consider the actual risks they face in their everyday lives and prioritise the messages that you will teach your child based on this. For example, a key message to teach your child is that they must stop when they are told. They should never try and cross a road until they have been told to by an adult they know.

However, you should also try to consider the risks that your child may face in the near future. Many pupils will start to walk and cycle independently aged 8-11, but children with additional needs may still require adult supervision during and beyond this age range. When your child transitions to secondary school, they may start to walk and cycle independently more often, if appropriate, and may encounter new pressures to act dangerously. Your child may not have had many chances to travel independently, but these opportunities may increase as they get older, so they will need to have an understanding of how to keep themselves safe<sup>13</sup>. Independent travel training may be available from your local council, which is designed to help to prepare your child for making independent journeys as they get older.



As a parent or carer, you will have an understanding of what is meaningful to your child and therefore what teaching methods they are most likely to respond to. For example, many children with additional needs respond well to clear instructions, with defined goals or rewards, as long as these goals or rewards are something that is relevant and important to them. Teaching any child road safety skills will involve a combination of theory-based and practical activities. Although you may feel wary of taking your child out on the road to practise these skills if they can be impulsive or easily distracted, taking them out on the road is important, as it will help them to relate road safety rules and skills to a real-life context and encourage them to take responsibility for their own safety<sup>14</sup>.

To begin, take your child out on a very quiet road, with pavements on both sides and crossings. It may be appropriate to practise walking to a local park, leisure centre or the local shop, using a quiet route. When you cross a road with your child, verbalise the rules and then ask your child to recite them before you cross, for example, "stop near the kerb, look left and then look right"<sup>15</sup>. Follow this routine each time you cross the road.

<sup>13</sup> Brake (undated) 'Devising road safety lessons and activities for pupils with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/564-devising-road-safety-lessons-and-activities-for-pupils-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.

<sup>14</sup> TRL (2002) 'Review of the road safety of disabled children and adults'

<https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TRL559.pdf>

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.

<sup>15</sup> TRL (2002) 'Review of the road safety of disabled children and adults'

<https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TRL559.pdf>



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

The following section offers advice on effectively teaching road safety skills to children with specific additional needs.

### ADHD and ADD<sup>16</sup>

- 🗨️ **Create and teach your child to develop personal routines** that are based on their actual behaviour and can be used to keep them safe. For example, if you walk your child to school, develop a routine they can use to walk to school safely, such as holding your hand and walking on the pavement, on the side furthest away from traffic. As you will walk this route often, you can begin to point out hazards and places where it is safe to cross the road
- 🗨️ **Use clear and specific instructions** to teach road safety skills. Do not use vague phrases, such as “cross the road safely”. Instead, you might say: “You should always stop and look and listen for traffic before crossing any road. Only cross when you're sure there's nothing coming. Always hold an adult's hand while crossing the road.”
- 🗨️ **Explain what is and is not appropriate behaviour;** for example, not running across the road.

### Autism<sup>17</sup>

- 🗨️ **Help children generalise road safety skills or rules,** encouraging them to apply what they have been taught on one road to all roads. For example, you will need to explain to your child that they should apply the Green Cross Code on all roads, not just on the road they have been taught. You could use pictures, stories or toy people and cars, asking your child what they should do in each case, to demonstrate that they must apply the Highway Code in all situations. Some of the examples you use could include pressures on the children to act dangerously or disobey the code, such as a friend calling to them from over the road, or being in a rush to get to school on time. It is also important to consider and highlight exceptions to rules, such as emergency service vehicles going through red lights
- 🗨️ **Use practical training, which is easier to generalise than other methods,** as it is based in a context that is closer to real life. Choose quiet roads with pavements on both sides to begin with
- 🗨️ **Explain the importance of safety rules in literal terms,** rather than putting them into a social context

---

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.

<sup>16</sup> Brake (undated) 'Devising road safety lessons and activities for pupils with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/564-devising-road-safety-lessons-and-activities-for-pupils-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.

<sup>17</sup> Brake (undated) 'Devising road safety lessons and activities for pupils with SEN'

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/564-devising-road-safety-lessons-and-activities-for-pupils-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

of what is acceptable or will be viewed favourably. For example, it may be better to explain to your child that not following safety rules could lead to them getting hurt, rather than talking about being “good”, “sensible” or “naughty”

- 👄 **Make sure your instructions are clear and complete.**

## Dyspraxia<sup>18</sup>

- 👄 **Teach the dangers of taking chances.** Children with dyspraxia may have particular difficulty judging the distance between them and approaching traffic. However, it's important to teach all children that it's difficult for anyone (even adults) to judge the speed at which traffic is approaching. Explain to your child that they should not cross unless they are certain that there is no traffic approaching. Ideally, they should use traffic-light-controlled or zebra crossings, although even when using these crossings, they must make sure that the traffic has stopped before crossing
- 👄 **Help children develop strategies for telling left from right.** Lots of children have difficulty telling left from right, so it is useful to help them come up with ways of telling left from right, such as holding up their forefingers and thumbs at right angles to see which hand makes an L shape to identify left. Explain to your child that before following an instruction, such as “look left”, they should stop and think about which is left and which is right. Encourage them to always ask if they are not sure.

## Dyslexia<sup>19</sup>

- 👄 **Help children develop strategies for telling left from right. (Advice as in the dyspraxia section above).** Lots of children have difficulty telling left from right, so it is useful to help them come up with ways of telling left from right, such as holding up their forefingers and thumbs at right angles to see which hand makes an L shape to identify left. Explain to your child that before following an instruction, such as “look left”, they should stop and think about which is left and which is right. Encourage them to always ask if they are not sure.

---

<sup>18</sup> Brake (undated) ‘Devising road safety lessons and activities for pupils with SEN’

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/564-devising-road-safety-lessons-and-activities-for-pupils-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.

<sup>19</sup> Brake (undated) ‘Devising road safety lessons and activities for pupils with SEN’

<http://www.brake.org.uk/facts-resources/21-resources/564-devising-road-safety-lessons-and-activities-for-pupils-with-sen>

Date Accessed: 07/09/2020.



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

# What to teach

In our [parent's guide to teaching road safety](#), you will find age-specific advice for teaching road safety skills to children, the key messages they should be aware of and tips for teaching them this information. However, as a parent or carer of a child with additional needs, some of these messages may not seem appropriate for your child to learn at the suggested stage due to their development. Although the guide provides an idea of the order in which you should aim to teach your child road safety skills, you will need to consider your child's ability to perceive and understand risks, in order to decide which road safety messages are appropriate to teach at this time.

Based on typical development, the road safety messages to convey to your child are:

### Under-5s

- 👉 Difference between footpath and the road
- 👉 How to walk with a grown-up who they know and hold hands near the road
- 👉 Introduce **Stop, Look, Listen and THINK**
- 👉 Introduce safer crossing places
- 👉 Be bright, be seen.



### 5-7 year olds

- 👉 How pedestrians walk safely on the pavement and vehicles use the road
- 👉 How to walk with an adult who they know and hold hands when walking near the road
- 👉 Safer crossing places and how to use them
- 👉 The **Stop, Look, Listen and THINK** sequence
- 👉 Places where it is not safe to cross the road.

### 7-11 year olds

- 👉 The Green Cross Code and how to put it into practice, recognising safe crossing places on the road
- 👉 Road signs and pedestrian crossings
- 👉 The Highway Code and the rules of the road.

If your child has the opportunity to learn about road safety skills at school, speak to your child's teacher about what key messages they are teaching your child and ask how you can reinforce these messages outside of school.



## Teaching aids

Although practical pedestrian training will be required to teach your child vital road safety skills, there are a number of teaching aids that can be used to supplement real life experience and help your child to develop a better understanding of how to keep themselves safe on the road.

### Social stories

Social stories can be a particularly useful aid for children who have autism and other additional needs. They are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include information about what to expect in that situation and why<sup>20</sup>. These can be used to help your child develop new skills, such as crossing the road safely when accompanied by an adult.

The National Autistic Society advises writing a social story for children on why they must not run out into the road<sup>21</sup>.

Social stories present information in a literal way, which may improve a person's understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity. The presentation and content can be adapted to meet different people's needs<sup>22</sup>. If your child has autism, they may find it difficult to sequence an activity (knowing what comes next) and using a social story can help them to develop this skill. Also, by providing information about what might happen in a particular situation, and some guidelines for behaviour, you can increase structure in a person's life, which your child may crave, thereby reducing their anxiety<sup>23</sup>.

Social stories may take the form of a comic strip, providing visual information as well as spoken, and can be referred to before an event. For example, before you go out for a walk you could read out the story on why we do not run out into the road. This can act as a behavioural strategy, helping your child to cope with emotions or any obsessions or special interests. For example, a child with a special interest in cars may walk out into the road if they see a car that they like.

---

<sup>20</sup> National Autistic Society (2018) 'Social stories and comic strip conversations'  
<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx> Date Accessed: 12/06/2020

<sup>21</sup> National Autistic Society (2017) 'Road safety and awareness of danger for people on the autism spectrum'  
[www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety](http://www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety) Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>22</sup> National Autistic Society (2018) 'Social stories and comic strip conversations'  
<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx> Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.

<sup>23</sup> National Autistic Society (2018) 'Social stories and comic strip conversations'  
<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx> Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

The creator of Social stories, Carol Grey, has developed guidelines on how to use social stories effectively:

- Think about ways to aid comprehension – would adding questions help, or replacing some text with blanks for the person to fill in?
- Find ways to support the story, e.g. create a poster with a key phrase from the story
- Plan how often, and where, the story will be reviewed with the person
- Present the social story to the person at a time when everyone is feeling calm and relaxed, using a straightforward approach; for example, you could say: “I have written this story for you. It is about keeping ourselves safe when we are walking. Let's read it together now.”

For more information on writing and using social stories:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

### Visual aids

Visual aids can also be used to communicate with children with additional needs, such as those on the autism spectrum. They are adaptable, portable and can be used in many situations, including to communicate with your child when you are out walking<sup>24</sup>.

A wide range of items can be used as a visual aid or support. These can be real objects, printed images or images displayed on a smartphone, tablet or computer. Some examples include:

- 👉 Tactile symbols or objects of reference, e.g. a pair of walking shoes
- 👉 Photographs
- 👉 Short videos
- 👉 Miniatures of real objects, e.g. a toy car or person
- 👉 Symbols
- 👉 Written words.

There are a number of sets of cards available to purchase to use as a visual support, or apps that can be downloaded. You could also make your own visual aids.

For more information on visual supports, visit:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports.aspx>



<sup>24</sup> National Autistic Society (2019) 'Visual Supports'

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports.aspx> Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.



## Teaching Road Safety to Children with Additional Needs

### Toys and games

To teach road safety skills, you could role play crossing the road safely using toys and games. Many toy shops sell road safety signs, car mats, toy people and cars and you may find it useful to play out different scenarios to show why it is dangerous to run out into the road.

There are also a number of interactive games available on the internet that can teach children about safety and crossing the road safely<sup>25</sup>.

### Safety equipment

If you are concerned about your child's safety near the road, a range of safety harnesses and other equipment can be purchased to help keep children and adults safe.

There are also a number of professionals who can offer support. Your child's school, the road safety team at your local council and charities may be able to offer advice.



---

<sup>25</sup> National Autistic Society (2017) 'Road safety and awareness of danger for people on the autism spectrum' [www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety](http://www.autism.org.uk/roadsafety) Date Accessed: 12/06/2020.





accidents don't have to happen

---

**RoSPA Head Office**

28 Calthorpe Road  
Birmingham  
B15 1RP  
☎ +44 (0)121 248 2000

**RoSPA Scotland**

43 Discovery Terrace  
Livingstone House  
Heriot-Watt University Research Park  
Edinburgh  
EH14 4AP  
☎ +44 (0)131 449 9378/79

**RoSPA Wales**

2nd Floor  
2 Cwrt-y-Parc  
Parc Ty Glas  
Cardiff Business Park  
Llanishen  
Cardiff  
CF14 5GH  
☎ +44 (0)2920 250600

**General Enquiries**

☎ +44 (0)121 248 2000  
☎ +44 (0)121 248 2001  
✉ help@rospa.com  
🐦 twitter.com/rospa  
📘 facebook.com/rospa  
🌐 linkedin.com/rospa

**www.rospa.com**

Registered Charity No. 207823  
VAT Registration No. 655 131649

