



The Walking Detective

Teaching Kids to Investigate
Their Community

LEADER'S GUIDE

Benefits of Walking and Biking

Walking and biking are good for everyone, especially kids! That's because they:

- Encourage an active, healthy lifestyle
- Teach pedestrian safety skills
- Give a sense of independence and responsibility
- Create an opportunity to interact with people in the community
- Reduce pollution created by cars

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that kids ages 6-17 get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, including aerobic activities like walking and biking.

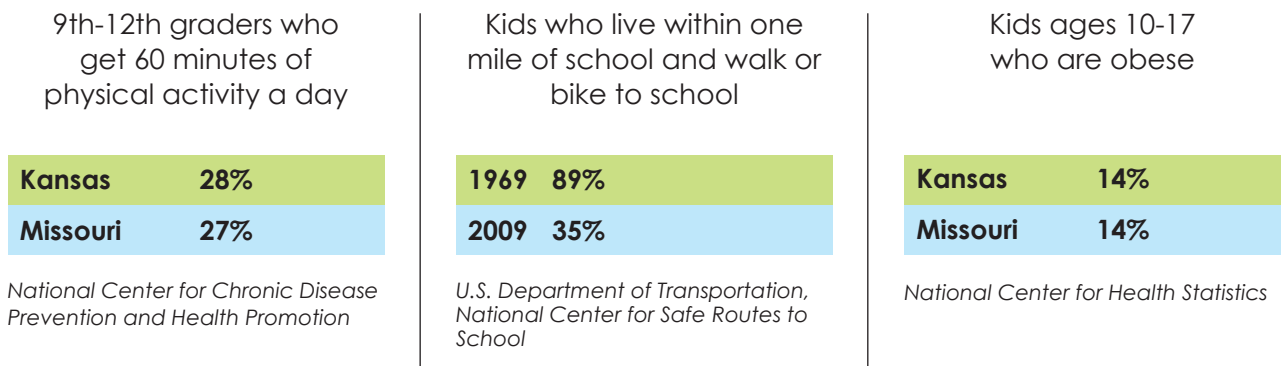
Walking and biking to school is one way kids can get physical exercise, but the number of kids using **active transportation** has notably decreased over the past 50 years.

This has a big impact on kids' physical, mental and social health. A 2012 report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that 17 percent of kids ages 2-19 are obese*, and rates are higher among minority and low-income kids. Obese kids have a higher risk of developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, asthma, joint problems, psychological stress and low self-esteem.

Unfortunately, there are a number of barriers that discourage or prevent kids from walking and biking. This guide is an easy tool for anyone who wants to teach kids about the benefits of walking and biking, the barriers that make those activities unsafe, and how to advocate for improvements.

Vocabulary

Active Transportation: self-propelled, human-powered transportation like walking and biking *(National Center for Health Statistics)*



*Childhood obesity is defined as a body mass index at or above the 95th percentile.

Barriers to Walking and Biking

Parent Concerns

Parents point to a number of barriers that discourage them from letting their kids walk and bike to school. Their main concerns are distance and pedestrian safety.

Parents are concerned about:

<u>Distance to School</u>	<u>62%</u>
<u>Traffic-Related Danger</u>	<u>30%</u>
<u>Weather</u>	<u>19%</u>
<u>Crime Danger</u>	<u>12%</u>
<u>Opposing School Policy</u>	<u>6%</u>

*National Center for Chronic Disease
Prevention and Health Promotion)*

Parents sometimes worry about their kids' personal safety while walking or biking in their community. Some of these fears are just misperceptions.

Check the Facts!

- 11% of reported missing kids were abducted. Only 1% of abductions were committed by a non-family member.
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
- 1% of students ages 12-18 were victims of violent crimes while at school, riding the school bus, or going to and from school. Bullying is far more prevalent at 22%.
National Center for Education Statistics

Parks & Rec

Kids need access to safe places to be active, and the **built environment** can be a barrier. A 2006 journal article in *Pediatrics* found a connection between the built environment, physical activity and health. According to the study, having parks and recreational facilities in a neighborhood increases the chance of physical activity and lowers the odds of being overweight. Minority and low-income neighborhoods often have fewer parks and recreation facilities, which is considered a **health disparity**.

Vocabulary



Built Environment: the physical parts of where we live, work and play like buildings, streets, open spaces and infrastructure

Health Disparity: when people of a certain income, race or geography experience lower health outcomes than others

Percent of population living within a half mile of a park:

Johnson (KS)	54
Leavenworth (KS)	28
Miami (KS)	17
Wyandotte (KS)	55
Cass (MO)	18
Clay (MO)	33
Jackson (MO)	59
Platte (MO)	22
Ray (MO)	26

*Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention*

State Government

State policy, planning and funding all play an important role in creating supportive communities for walking, biking and physical activity. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership released state report cards in 2016 rating states' support for walking, biking and physical activity for adults and kids. Both Kansas and Missouri ranked fairly well in terms of planning for physical activity. However in both states, the built environment is a barrier for walking and biking, especially in Kansas.

REPORT CARD

Student: Kansas Grade: D

Subject	Points Possible	Points Scored
Complete Street and Active Transportation	55	0
Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation Funding	70	27
Active Neighborhoods and Schools	45	32
State Physical Activity Planning	30	22
Total	200	81

Safe Routes to School National Partnership

REPORT CARD

Student: Missouri Grade: D

Subject	Points Possible	Points Scored
Complete Street and Active Transportation	55	21
Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation Funding	70	13
Active Neighborhoods and Schools	45	20
State Physical Activity Planning	30	26
Total	200	80

Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Walking Investigation

A walking investigation is a tool for evaluating the **walkability** of your community. It rates the condition of the built environment based on the following criteria:

- Infrastructure and Maintenance
- Physical and Visual Obstructions
- Street and Intersection Crossing
- Safety and Comfort
- Streetscaping and Amenities

This walking investigation has been designed specifically for kids because they experience and perceive the built environment differently than adults. With this tool, you can help kids:

- Evaluate the walkability of their community
- Learn about the built environment
- Feel empowered to advocate for change

It also gives adults insight into aspects of the built environment they may have overlooked.

Kids have different levels of understanding and pedestrian skills. Keep this in mind while guiding the walking investigation. Have realistic expectations of their abilities. Model safe pedestrian skills and reinforce ideas through repetition, especially for younger kids.

Vocabulary



Walkability: a variety of goods and services are safely and easily accessible to everyone in a community by walking and biking



Plan Your Route

Before mapping a specific route, think about the overall safety and walkability of the area. It should have a mix of positive and negative characteristics so kids can make comparisons. Consider including the kids in mapping a route. Ask them what streets they use to get to school or the park when they walk or bike.

- Select one or more destinations as starting and ending points, then map the route. Aim for one-half to one mile round trip, depending on the age of the kids.
- Try to include a variety of streets, from residential side streets to intersections with traffic signals.
- Walk the route in advance to identify points of interest and resting spots for discussion.
- Time how long it takes to walk the route. Remember you will be taking time to stop and talk along the way. Thirty minutes is ideal.
- Create a route map and provide one to each child and volunteer. (If you have a large number of kids, you may want to break up into smaller groups. You can even give each group their own route.)

Here is a list of items you will want to take on the walk:

- Clipboards
- Kid's Workbooks
- Pencils
- Route maps
- Cameras
- Measuring tape

Before the Walk

Before going on the walk, gather the group for a short introduction.

Ask: Why is walking and biking good for you?

Give kids time to answer and encourage them to explain their answers. Here are some things you should mention if they don't:

- Helps you have an active and healthy lifestyle
- Teaches you how to walk safely
- Gives you a chance to talk with neighbors
- Cuts down on pollution created by cars

Before the Walk continued

Remind the kids to follow these pedestrian safety tips during the walking investigation to make sure everyone is safe:

Say: Just like we have rules at school, there are rules for walking that keep you safe.

- Walk on the sidewalk. If there is no sidewalk, walk on the left side of the street so cars can see you coming. (Depending on their age, ask them to raise their left hands.)
- Look for cars in all directions before crossing the street.
- Do not run across the street or dart out between cars.
- Obey traffic signals at intersections. (Review red, yellow green and walk signals)
- Children under 10 should not cross the street without an adult. (If your group is under 10, say "No one in this group should cross the street without an adult.")
- Follow the route on the map you will be given.

During the Walk

During the walk, encourage kids to take investigation notes on the page at the end of the kid's workbook.

**Ask: What do you see that makes it safe and easy to walk or bike?
What makes it unsafe and hard to walk or bike?**

- Write a list of things that make it easy or difficult to walk or bike.
- Measure the width of the sidewalk using a measuring tape.
- Draw pictures, make a map or take photos of important observations.

For younger kids, play a game of "I Spy." Ask the kids to point out elements of the built environment like sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signs and streetlights.

Evaluate Your Community

When you reach the end of the walk, gather the group to talk about their notes and observations.

Ask: Is this neighborhood a safe and easy place to walk and bike? Why or why not?

- Go through the clue checklist and assign scores to the built environment. Add up the scores to get the walkability score for your community.
- Identify a few things that need to be improved to make it safer to walk and bike.
- Come up with solutions for the problems you identified. (Remind kids that some ideas are quick and easy, while others take more time and money.)

Write Your Lawmakers

Finally, have the kids write letters to their lawmakers to advocate for a more walkable and bikeable community. Make sure kids include problems that need to be fixed as well as positive comments saying what they liked about the neighborhood in their letters.

Collect their investigation notes, photos and advocacy letters to send to your lawmakers. Links to help you find their contact information are provided below.

Be sure to let the kids know about any actions taken as a result of their walking investigation and advocacy letters!

Helpful Websites

Contact Elected Officials - [usa.gov/elected-officials](https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials)

Learn how to get in touch with your federal, state, and local elected leaders.

BikeWalkKC - [bikewalkkc.org](https://www.bikewalkkc.org)

BikeWalkKC is a member-supported 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works to make Greater Kansas City a safer and more accessible place to walk, bicycle, live, work, and play.

Mid-America Regional Council - [marc.org](https://www.marc.org)

MARC is a nonprofit association of city and county governments and the metropolitan planning organization for the bistate Kansas City region.

National Center for Safe Routes to School - [saferoutesinfo.org](https://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

The National Center for Safe Routes to School assists states and communities in enabling and encouraging children to safely walk and bicycle to school.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center - [pedbikeinfo.org](https://www.pedbikeinfo.org)

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center's mission has been to improve the quality of life in communities through the increase of safe walking and bicycling as a viable means of transportation and physical activity.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Childhood Obesity Causes and Consequences. 2015.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Childhood Obesity Facts. 2012.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Impact of the Built Environment on Health. 2011.

Courtney Babb and Carey Curtis. Evaluating the Built Environment for Children's Active Travel to School. 2013.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. 2014 State Indicator Report on Physical Activity. 2014.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Barriers to Children Walking to and from School. 2004.

National Center for Health Statistics. National Survey of Children's Health. 2007.

National Center for Safe Routes to School. How Children Get to School: School Travel Patterns from 1969 to 2009. 2011.

National Center for Safe Routes to School. Personal Safety and Safe Routes to School. 2010.

National Physical Activity Plan Alliance. 2014 United States Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. 2014.

Penny Gordon-Larsen, Melissa C. Nelson, Phil Page, and Barry M. Popkin. Inequality in the Built Environment Underlies Key Health Disparities in Physical Activity and Obesity. Pediatrics Volume 117 Number 2. 2006.

Safe Routes to School National Partnership. Making Strides: State Report Cards on Support for Walking, Bicycling, and Active Kids and Communities. 2016.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. 2008.

U.S. Department of Transportation. A Resident's Guide for Creating Safe and Walkable Communities. 2008.

U.S. Department of Transportation. Nationwide Personal Transportation Study: Transportation Characteristics of School Children. Report No. 4. 1972.

kchealthykids™

KC Healthy Kids rallies the people in our communities to improve access to affordable fresh food and safe places to walk and play. When our neighborhoods support healthy habits, we are less likely to suffer from obesity, which is linked to Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and poor mental health. To make a lasting impact, we shape policies that improve our food system and physical surroundings, and ultimately, the places where we live, work, learn and play.

650 Minnesota Ave • Kansas City, KS, 66101 • (816) 523-5353

kchealthykids.org • @KCHealthyKids

