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Let's Walk

By Beth Proudfoot

We have a terrible problem with traffic congestion around Williams before and after school. All of those cars pose a safety risk for the children and pollute the environment. We're a neighborhood school now, and most of us live within a mile of the campus. Why not allow children to walk to school?

Let's dismiss the abduction worries right away. Your child has more of a chance of being hit by lightning than being abducted in this suburban neighborhood at 7:45am. Now, when consequences are really horrible, we tend to take precautions even when the likelihood is low. We don't swim during thunderstorms and we certainly don't send our six-year-olds to the mall by themselves. But, if our six-year-olds travel with older buddies and are savvy about basic safety rules, the chances of abduction go down to essentially zero. (And, as the Polly Klaas case demonstrated, children can be abducted out of their own bedrooms. There's a limit to what we can do to keep them safe.) One other point: children who exude confidence are much less likely to be victims of any kind of crime. And they're not going to get that confidence unless they get a chance to be out in the world by themselves.

We live in one of the safest neighborhoods in San Jose – really in the state. It's those bored and aggressive teenagers who cause the most problems and they're still in bed or locked up in school at 8 and 2. Children are unlikely victims for robbery and, frankly, we don't have any drug dealers on the corners here. Crime simply is not an issue.

If we're going to worry about things, then it would be logical to think of the more likely dangers. Cars. Whether the children are inside the cars or on the sidewalk, it is the other well-meaning but harried parents who are hurrying to school whose pose the greatest threat of harm. And, if more children were walking to school there would be fewer cars on the road and....you get the idea.

Is time your problem? You'd be surprised how little time it takes for children to walk a half a mile. My kids leave the house exactly five minutes earlier than when we were driving. We don't get up earlier, they just hurry faster. And I get to have an extra cup of coffee before I start my day.

Being completely in charge of whether they get to school on time teaches children responsibility. Walking to school provides them with exercise and maybe a little fresh air (once more of the cars are gone). It frees up parents' time. It's good for the environment. The weather is beautiful. It's lighter in the mornings now. Give it a try.

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