

# Facts, Expert Opinions, and Precedents on Self-Supervised Kids and Active School Travel

## Health, Development, and Well-Being

- “Recent studies provide consistent evidence that children who have greater independent mobility are significantly more active... In addition, Floyd and colleagues ... noted that the presence of a parent or another adult (in parks) was associated with reduced physical activity. **Together, these findings emphasize the importance of unsupervised outdoor activities.**” ([Shaw et al](#))<sup>1</sup>
- “Especially for children, active and independent travel can contribute to physical activity, social and motor development, and other health-related outcomes...From a public health perspective, **considering children’s independent mobility in intervention programs is recommended, since it is associated with numerous health and environmental benefits.**” ([Marzi and Reimers](#))<sup>2</sup>
- “If (children) are accompanied on trips (rather than going out alone), **there is a strong likelihood they will be driven to their destination and also have to be collected.** This generates further traffic as parents drop off and then return to pick up their children, or alternatively have to wait around during the activity. **This has obvious implications for parents’ and children’s lifestyles as well as social and environmental consequences.** Extra traffic is likely to further reduce the likelihood that parents will grant their children independent mobility.” ([Shaw et al.](#))<sup>3</sup>
- The [Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada](#)<sup>4</sup> endorses ParticipAction's 2015 position statement on active outdoor play for children ages 3-12: "Access to active play in nature and outdoors-with its risks-is essential for healthy child development. **We recommend increasing children's opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings-at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.**"
- [The Public Health Agency of Canada](#)’s strategic imperative 1.4 of their “Common Vision” document is: “**Remove stigmas and stereotypes around letting children play outdoors alone** (where parents may feel judged or labelled for letting children play on their own) by reinforcing that active, free play is “risky” but not always unsafe (e.g., kids recognize and can evaluate risk according to their own ability).”<sup>5</sup>
- “**Kids with ready access to unsupervised outdoor play have better-developed motor skills, social behaviour, independence and conflict resolution skills.**” ([ParticipACTION](#))<sup>6</sup>
- [Brussoni et al.](#) systematic review of risky play studies: “The evidence... indicates that **the overall positive health effects of increased risky outdoor play provide greater benefit than the health effects associated with avoiding outdoor risky play...** (and) that risky play supportive environments promoted increased play time, social interactions, creativity and resilience. These positive results reflect the importance supporting children’s risky outdoor play opportunities as a means of promoting children’s health and active lifestyles.”<sup>7</sup>
- [The Attachment Network of Manitoba](#)<sup>8</sup> says in their "10 Things Your School Age Child Wants You To Know" document: "**I need to explore and practice becoming more independent.** When it’s safe, I’ll be okay walking to nearby places on my own, going on

a sleepover or to summer camp. When you have confidence in me, I feel good about myself and can develop new skills."

- [Dr. Peter Gray](#), psychology professor, says "over the same decades that play has been declining, we have seen a well-documented increase in all sorts of mental disorders in childhood...five to eight times as many children today suffer from major depression or from a clinically significant anxiety disorder as was true in the 1950s... **Children are more depressed today than they were during the great depression. They are more anxious today than they were during the Cold War when they were continuously being warned of the threat of nuclear holocaust...**"<sup>9</sup>
- [ParticipAction](#)<sup>10</sup> has identified the *protection paradox*: "children are overprotected in the name of safety, but trying to keep them safe by keeping them close and indoors may set them up to be less resilient and more likely to develop chronic diseases in the long run."). They also call on society to "**recognize that children are competent and capable... and respect parents' assessments of their children's abilities and their decisions to encourage self-directed play in nature and the outdoors.**"

### Safety

- "When children are supported to take risks, **they have more fun and learn how to assess and manage risk in all areas of their lives.**" ([ParticipACTION](#))<sup>11</sup>
- "There are many reasons for (children's) shrinking mobility, including perceptions of 'stranger danger,' bullying and traffic, **but these safety concerns appear to be largely unfounded** as the odds of child abduction by a stranger are extremely rare (1 in 14 million), and children are 8 times more likely to be involved in a motor vehicle accident as a passenger than as a pedestrian. Overall, **parental overprotection and societal attitudes that lean toward parental supervision have contributed to eliminating the active, independent, unstructured (risky) aspect of outdoor play.** Yet, children need this type of play, as it contributes to their physical, emotional and psychological development which supports the skills necessary to thrive as adults." ([Canadian Public Health Association](#))<sup>12</sup>)
- "While research shows parents most fear that their child will be hit by a car or kidnapped if they walk to school alone, they are at greater risk of injury by being in a car... 'Paradoxically, **parents don't realize that putting a child in a car and driving to school actually puts them at greater risk of injury.**'" ([Dr. Mariana Brussoni](#))<sup>13</sup>, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia)
- "...After controlling for the built environment, the number of children walking (in Toronto) was not associated with the likelihood of collisions. Their results suggest that **walking to/from school is relatively safe, even in the City of Toronto**, and that safety could be further enhanced by improving the design of intersections. ([Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play](#))<sup>14</sup>)
- According to the [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#)<sup>15</sup>, "**A fear of strangers is not the best approach to protect children from victimization... (It is) outdated and ineffective.**"
- [Canada Safety Council](#)<sup>16</sup>: "When parents give their children a general warning such as "never talk to strangers" they are running a risk. **At some point in time, their children may need a stranger's help** and they have to be taught the difference."

### On Minimum Ages

- A simple age limit for leaving children unsupervised is **inappropriate because it gives a false sense of security**. Every child is different, and risk needs to be introduced incrementally. ([Dr. Mariana Brussoni](#)<sup>17</sup>, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia)

### Attitudes Elsewhere

- [CAA of South Central Ontario](#): “Children mature at different rates, so the decision as to when your children should walk to school by themselves is best left up to you. **Remember, walking to school at a young age is a positive choice**. Start by walking them halfway, which will help to increase their confidence and sense of responsibility.”<sup>18</sup>
- [Saskatoon Public Schools](#)<sup>19</sup>: “As parents and educators, we know learning is enhanced by rehearsal and practice... **With rehearsal, education and planning, the walk to school can be one of your child's first steps towards learning independence.**”
- In Odense, Denmark, a city of 200,000 people, **children as young as 5 ride their bikes to school without an adult**. ([Fast Company](#)<sup>20</sup>)
- Japanese children in first grade and up routinely navigate busy urban environments and complex public transit systems to get to school. “Seven-year-old Ryuhei seems unfazed by any debate of his daily journey. In fact, he questions why America's children can't go to school alone. **‘But, why can't kids ride trains by themselves?’** he asked. ([CBS News](#))<sup>21</sup>
- [International study of children’s mobility](#)<sup>22</sup>: “The degree of independent mobility granted to Finnish children is striking. **At age 7, a majority of Finnish children can already travel to places within walking distance or cycle to places alone**; by age 8 a majority can cross main roads, travel home from school and go out after dark alone, by age 9 a majority can cycle on main roads alone, and by age 10 a majority can travel on local buses alone.”

### In Manitoba

- Transportation makes up **the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in Manitoba** at nearly 40% of the total, which contributes to a more extreme and unpredictable climate for future generations. ([Government of Manitoba](#)<sup>23</sup>)
- Of Manitoba kids ages 5-17, **two-thirds get to school by motor vehicle**. ([Green Action Centre](#)<sup>24</sup>)
- [A recent Winnipeg Free Press poll](#)<sup>25</sup> asked “Should the CFS Act allow kids under the age of 12 more freedoms?”. As of January 3, 2019, **82% responded “Yes, each child matures differently and parents know them best.”**

## **References for Facts, Expert Opinions, and Precedents on Self-Supervised Kids and Active School Travel**

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<https://www.cpha.ca/risky-play-essential-child-development>
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