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LOOK OUT!

by Sandra Rohrstaff

We all get reminders when school starts in the Fall. Signs show up – watch out for children now that school is back in session. Radio announcements are made – look out for children walking to school. Newspapers have public service announcements.

All that is VERY important. Those of us who don't have children in school may forget the shifts in activities that revolve around school schedules.

Well, now that spring is here and summer is about to begin, schools are letting out, and it's another important time to watch out for children. Not only are they out walking, they're out riding bicycles.

Don't you remember what it was like to be free from school and getting up early and studying and completing projects? Well, children are still children, and they still relish that freedom.

Don't you remember feeling free and alive -- and invulnerable to harm? Children of many ages think they are bullet proof.

So, it's all the more critical that you teach your children bicycle safety rules, and then retrain them and retrain them again.

Personally, I grew up in a small country town in South Texas, and my husband grew up in a small town in Wisconsin. There were no bike helmets and I more often than not rode my bike barefooted. We could get on our bikes and ride through town and down highways without a care in the world.

It's not that way today. Today our children are forced to ride their bikes on streets where there are more cars moving faster than in those bygone days. Drivers are less attentive. I'm sure you've seen women putting on their makeup as they drive down the road and all kinds of people, young and old, text messaging (which is unlawful in Virginia as of July 1, 2009) or using one hand to hold the phone up to their ear or to put food into their mouth.

The other day I saw a man coming at me with a map held up in front of his face! I understand how important it is for a driver to know where he's going, but that was stupid and scary.

We all have a responsibility to look out for children, especially young children, who are out on their bikes. The law in Virginia is that children cannot be held responsible for – well -- acting like children. If a child darts out in front of a moving car in an area where the driver should

know there are children (around a playground or in a neighborhood, for instance), it is not the child's fault if the driver hits her; it is the fault of the driver who should have known to look out for children behaving like children.

The Virginia Department of Health website has a list of helpful resources for parents and educators about bicycle safety. <http://www.vahealth.org/injury/bike/resources.htm>.

Bicycle safety is up to all of us.

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