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Signs, Symbols, and Safety in the Community

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Signs are here, signs are there...*survival signs are everywhere!* Survival signs provide rules and important information to help keep the public safe and informed. Common public places where you may see these signs include schools, hospitals, highways, roadways, and parking lots. "Exit," "Men," "Women," "Fire Extinguisher," "Watch Your Step," "Out of Order," and "Caution: Wet Floor" are just a few examples of signs you may see in a day. Many young children do not understand the meaning or importance of these signs. Introducing these everyday signs to your children can help them increase awareness of their surroundings. Teaching the meanings of these signs can help them learn their importance for keeping everyone safe—every day!

Ways to Teach Survival Signs

There are many ways you can help your children learn the different survival signs. Below are some fun suggestions for helping them learn about the various signs that are designed to keep them safe. In addition to directly teaching them about survival signs, have a discussion with your children about why we have these signs and what the consequences might be if we didn't have these signs in our communities.



Teach shapes, colors, and letters.

Survival signs use specific colors, shapes, letters, and symbols to give information. For example, a big, white "H" on a blue square-shaped sign indicates that a hospital is close by, the letter "R" appearing on either side of an "X" shows you where a railroad crossing is located, and a red octagon (shape with eight sides) with a white border and the word "STOP" in white letters directs you to stop your car. A picture, such as food or a person diving or skating, that is in a circle with a red slash through it means that those activities are not allowed. And a stoplight has three special colors—green ("go"), yellow ("slow down"), and red ("stop"). Teach your children the certain colors, shapes, letters, and symbols for the various signs in the community.



Practice with signs at home.

Print out survival signs you find online or even make your own signs out of paper and markers or crayons. Place these "homemade" signs around your house and use them to role-play with your children. For example, pretend you are a car and say, "Hmm...I see a red octagon. What should I do?" You can also play games such as *Red Light, Green Light* (walk when you say/hold up *Green Light*, stop when you say/hold up *Red Light*) to reinforce the colors of a stoplight and their meanings. You can also place "EXIT" signs strategically throughout your house and use them to practice fire evacuation drills at home. For additional practice, have your children place various signs around your home and have them ask you questions about the signs and what they mean.



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Go out in the community.

You can also help teach your children about survival signs in the community by simply taking a walk in your neighborhood or around your town. It can be a fun game to see how many signs your children can find. Then have them tell you what the signs mean and why they are in certain locations. To reinforce safe street-crossing habits, you can have a special song you sing whenever you reach an intersection, like—*Wait till you get to the end of the block, then cross when the sign tells you to walk. Look left, look right, look all around, and only cross the street when no cars can be found!* Be sure that your children also know how to identify different types of emergency exit signs in the community. Talk to your children about the importance of being aware of points of exit from buildings like schools, stores, malls, and theaters, as well.



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