

School Buses: Creating Better, Safer Rides

“Everyone is in awe of the lion tamer in a cage with a half of a dozen lions—everyone but a school bus driver.”—Dr. Laurence J. Peter, American educator

Many kids get to and from school by riding a school bus, and that journey can determine how your child’s day begins—and ends. A number of communities have made the bus ride an asset-building experience, and as a parent, you also can make the experience better and safer with these ideas.

Try it...

For all parents

- Tell your children that riding a school bus is a privilege, not a right. The way they act on the school bus is important. They need to respect the bus driver and other riders, and they also need to follow the rules to ensure a safe ride.
- Model and talk about school bus safety. When you see a school bus, follow the rules by not driving around a bus. Give children time to enter and disembark safely. Visit the Web site, [The School Bus Rules](#), for tips on school bus rules for parents.
- Find out if your school district has a list of bus rules or a student-parent-bus contract for everyone to sign. When everyone knows the rules, it’s easier to follow them and expect others to follow them as well.
- Be aware that the bus ride is one of the primary places for teasing and bullying. Find out how the school deals with bullying prevention on the bus in terms of expectations for behavior, the consequences for violations, and the training and support bus drivers get. Tell your child that he should not feel intimidated on the bus, and to come to you if that happens.
- Know your child’s route to the bus stop. Practice walking it with your child before the first day of school so that your child knows it well.
- Get to know your child’s bus driver. Introduce yourself on the first day of school and ask the driver for her name. When you see the bus driver, greet her by name, smile, and say how much you appreciate the work she does.
- Celebrate National School Bus Safety Week in the third week of October each year. For more information, check out [National Association for Pupil Transportation](#).
- If possible, try to have at least one adult in your neighborhood stationed at the bus stop while children wait. If there are a lot of working parents, see if you can take turns to ensure there’s an adult to keep an eye on kids at the bus stop.
- On the last day of school, go out of your way to thank the bus driver. If you feel it’s appropriate, have your child make a thank-you card to give to the driver.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Some preschools and child care centers now have pick-up vans and small buses for transportation. If this is the case for your child, be clear that your child needs to sit in his seat at all times when on the bus.
- If your child has never ridden a bus, consider taking an excursion together on a city bus or on some type of mass transit. Talk about how the bus (or subway) helps people to get where they are going just like a car does.
- Keep reminding children to sit down as the bus moves. Many hop up when they see something interesting outside the window and can easily fall as the bus moves or turns.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Show your child the danger zone of a bus (which is about 10 feet around the outside of the entire bus). Explain how most accidents happen in this danger zone, which is why it's important to be especially careful in this area and to get out of the danger zone as quickly as possible.
- If your child is afraid to ride the bus at first, consider riding the bus with your child. Or set up a time to volunteer at the school and accompany your child on the bus.
- Explain that the bus driver is like a teacher. It's important for your child to listen and do what the driver says.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Kids at this age can get a bit rowdy on the bus. Continue to emphasize that they shouldn't create unsafe conditions by being too noisy or moving around.
- Encourage your child to get to know the bus driver. Talk about how it's not easy to be a bus driver, and your child can make a bus driver's day by saying hello to her.
- If your child needs to bring a bulky item to school (such as a school project or a tuba or a double bass), consider giving your child a ride. Taking large items on the bus is not easy, especially if the bus has a lot of kids (which most do now because of budget cuts).
- Some kids enjoy riding the bus home with a friend. If your child wants to do this, check with the school office about what you need to do to make this happen. Some teachers or schools require a permission slip from a parent.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Some teenagers (especially those with cars) make fun of other teenagers who have to ride the school bus. Be clear that this is not acceptable. Many teenagers need to ride a bus to get to school, and one type of transportation is not better than another. In fact, point out how bus riders don't have to pay for gas, car maintenance, or car insurance.
- Find out if your school requires teenagers to ride a bus to certain off-campus events, such as a college fair, a school dance, or a state tournament. Find out when buses are to leave and when they will return so that you know what to expect.
- If your teenager's bus also picks up younger children, encourage your teenager to

be kind and helpful to the other riders. Encourage them to greet and get to know the younger children, since many are terrified to ride a bus with so many “big kids.”