

Sample Drop-In Articles

School Bus Safety

Twenty-four million students nationwide ride a school bus to and from school each day. Wherever you live, the familiar yellow school bus is one of the most common motor vehicles on the road. It is also the safest. School buses manufactured after January 1, 1977 must meet more federal motor vehicle safety standards than any other type of motor vehicle. In fact, school buses are nearly seven times safer than passenger cars or light trucks.

But school bus transportation is not without its hazards. Since 1995, 170 school-age pedestrians have died in school transportation-related crashes. Nearly two-thirds (65%) school-age pedestrians younger than 19 years old were killed by school buses, 5 percent by vehicles functioning as school buses, and 30 percent by other vehicles involved in the crashes.

On average, pedestrian fatalities in school transportation-related crashes account for nearly three out of every four school-age pedestrian fatalities. Nearly half of the pedestrian fatalities were young children between 5 and 7 years old.

Getting On and Off the Bus Safely

Because getting on and off the bus is the most dangerous part of the school bus ride, the loading and unloading area is called the "Danger Zone." This area - which extends ten feet in front of the bus, ten feet on each side of the bus, and behind the bus - is where children are at greatest risk of not being seen by the bus driver.

Throughout the year, especially at the start of school, children need to be taught how to get on and off the school bus safely. Parents should help their children learn and follow these common-sense practices:

- Get to the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive. Running to catch the bus is dangerous and can lead to injuries.
- When the bus approaches, stand at least five giant steps (10 feet) away from the curb, and line up away from the street.
- Wait until the bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says that it's okay to board before stepping onto the bus.
- If you have to cross the street in front of the bus, walk on the sidewalk or along the road to a point at least five giant steps ahead of the bus before you cross. Be sure that the bus driver can see you and you can see the bus driver when crossing the street. Stop at the edge of the bus and look left-right-left before crossing.

- Use the handrails to avoid falls. When getting off the bus, be careful that clothing with drawstrings and book bags and backpacks with straps don't get caught in the handrails or door.
- Never walk behind the bus.
- Walk at least five giant steps away from the side of the bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, tell the bus driver. Never try to pick it up, because the driver might not be able to see you.

Riding Safely

Students also need to behave safely during the school bus ride. Basic safety rules include the following:

- Always sit fully in the seat and face forward
- Never distract the driver
- Don't stand on a moving bus
- Obey the driver
- Speak in a low voice. Do not scream or shout
- Never stick anything out the window (arms, legs, head, book bags, etc.)

Safety Rules for Motorists

Motorists also need to observe traffic safety rules around school buses. In every state, it is illegal to pass a school bus that has stopped to load or unload students.

Motorists must learn to stop when the "flashing signal light system" is activated. School bus drivers use this system to alert drivers that the bus is going to stop to load or unload students:

- Yellow flashing lights indicate the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.
- Red flashing lights and extended stop arm indicate that the bus has stopped and that children are getting on or off. Motorists must stop their cars and wait until the red flashing lights are turned off, the stop arm is withdrawn, and the bus begins moving before they start driving again.
[ADD INFORMATION ON YOUR STATE LAW]

Motorists should also observe the following traffic safety rules:

- When backing out of a driveway or leaving a garage, watch out for children walking to the bus stop or walking or bicycling to school.
- When driving in neighborhoods, especially in school zones, watch out for young people who may be thinking about getting to school, but may not be thinking about getting there safely.

- Slow Down. Watch for children walking in the street, especially where there are no sidewalks. Watch for children playing and gathering near bus stops.
- Be Alert and ready to stop. Children arriving late for the bus may dart into the street without looking for traffic.