



School Bus Stop Safety for Parents

Best Practice

It's that time of year. Schools are opening, and children are traveling on school buses again. Over and over, students will hear the same admonitions: "stay seated and talk quietly during your bus ride", "don't stand or play in the aisle", "follow the bus driver's instructions", and "don't throw things in the bus or out the window". These are all important rules of safety and civility that parents should discuss with their children. This year, however, you should consider spending extra time talking about those safety rules that are most likely to save your child's life. What is the most serious danger facing children who take a bus to school every day? It's being struck by a motor vehicle, whether they are waiting at the bus stop, getting on and off the bus, or walking away from the bus after they get off. This danger isn't simply limited to cars, trucks, or motorcycles; a school bus can strike and kill a child just as easily.

When you talk about these safety issues with your child, start the discussion at home but continue the conversation at the bus stop. You need to assess the relative dangers your child will confront at the bus stop. You must ask yourself a number of questions about the location of the bus stop and the times of pick-up and drop-off. For instance, will your child be standing on a sidewalk in a well-lit and safe area of your city or will your child be standing at the end of a dark, gravel driveway on a country road? In the fall and winter, will your child be picked up at dawn, dusk, or when it's dark? Will your child be picked up at a bus stop that is on a long, straight street, or at a bus stop near a curve in the road? Is the bus stop located on a busy street that lots of trucks and buses occupy or on a quiet street that ends in a cul-de-sac?

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES TO KEEP IN MIND?

- **Visibility.** You don't want your child to stand close to the road itself because this will put your child in a danger zone. Regardless where your child stands, however, it is always a good idea for any child standing or walking near a road to wear clothing that makes it easy for passing motorists to see them. Bright yellow, orange, and white clothes are helpful. If your child stands at a bus stop early in the morning or late in the day, they should wear clothing made with at least some reflective material, be it a jacket with reflective stripes or shoes, book bags, and hats with reflective tape. The headlights of a vehicle will pick up reflective clothing and gear from as far away as 500 feet.
- Your child must stand in one safe place you designate, and wait quietly for the bus. After looking carefully at your child's particular bus stop, you must decide where it is safest for them to stand and wait for the bus. Usually, this will be about twelve feet away from the road and the bus stop. In most school districts, the same bus driver will pick up your child every day. Talk to the driver and tell them where you would like your child to stand and wait. This way the driver will know where to look for your child when approaching the bus stop. The driver can also share with you their experience and give you advice about the safest places children can wait for school buses.

- Danger Zones. Your child is entering a danger zone when they approach within twelve feet of a school bus, from any direction.
- Your child should stand back and allow the bus to come to a full stop, the door to open, and the driver to give the "OK" before moving to step onto the bus.
- Like trucks and cars, a school bus has blind spots or no zones where it is difficult for the driver to see vehicles or pedestrians approaching. A student should never walk behind a school bus for any reason and certainly should not cross the street there. The bus driver may back up suddenly.
- Crossing the street is always dangerous, and a child should cross the street in front of the school bus. Immediately after descending from the bus, they should turn left, walk straight for at least ten to fifteen feet, and then make eye contact with the driver before crossing the street in front of the school bus. Your child needs to understand that if they cannot see the bus driver, from their vantage point, the driver probably can't see them. Most bus drivers will give your child a signal to begin crossing the street. Make sure your child knows to wait for this signal.
- As your child crosses the street, they should look right for traffic approaching from the opposite direction, but they also need to look left to make sure the school bus does not start to move forward while they crosses directly in front of it.
- Motorists do disobey the law. Occasionally they pass a school bus on the left after the bus has turned on its flashing red lights and has stopped. Teach your child to look left just before stepping beyond the front of the school bus. Also, remind them that, although it only happens rarely, a motorist may pass the school bus on the right. Your child needs to take a look to his right, just before stepping off the school bus, to make sure the way is clear.
- If your child has to walk to the bus stop on a roadway or shoulder where there is no sidewalk, they should always walk facing traffic.
- If you meet your child at the bus stop, wait for them on the same side of the street as the bus stop, not across the street. As they get off the bus, your child may be distracted when they see you, and may fail to watch for traffic as they cross the street.
- Explain to your child that they should never bend down near or under a school bus to pick up something. The driver may lose sight of them and start moving forward.

After you have asked yourself these questions - and others that occur to you when you stand at your child's bus stop and observe the surroundings - do the following. Make a list of the specific dangers your child may face. Consider what actions your child can take to avoid the dangerous situations you have listed. Review the action plan with your child. Wait with them at the bus stop for at least the first few days to ensure they have understood your instructions (assuming your child is old enough to stand alone at a bus stop in the first place). Check on them ever so often thereafter to make sure they continue to follow the rules you've established. Review with your child their school's bus safety and behavior policy. Stress the importance of these rules and let your child know that you support, without reservation, their school's safety regulations. However, the most important lesson you can teach your child is that they are the one who is ultimately responsible for their own safety. This is their job, and they cannot always count on someone else to look out for them.