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Ride Safe

Bus safety tips for back-to-school

FAMILY FEATURES

While school safety is of the utmost importance to parents, millions of school-age children begin and end their days with a bus ride. To provide some measures for parents to help increase safety going to and from the bus and during the ride, the National Association for Pupil Transportation offers these tips.

Before the Bus Arrives

- Ensure backpacks are packed securely so papers and other items don't scatter as the bus approaches.
- Create a morning routine that puts kids at the bus stop five minutes before the scheduled pickup time. This helps avoid a last-minute rush, when safety lessons are easily forgotten, and ensures kids are safely in place for boarding.
- Encourage children to wear bright, contrasting colors so they can be seen easier by drivers.
- Walk young children to the bus stop or encourage kids to walk in groups. There is safety in numbers; groups are easier for drivers to see.
- Instruct children to walk on the sidewalk. If there is no sidewalk, advise them to stay out of the street, walk single-file, face traffic and stay as close to the edge of the road as possible.
- If kids must cross a street, driveway or alley, remind them to stop and look both ways before crossing.
- Verify that the bus stop location offers good visibility for the bus driver; if changes are needed, talk with nearby homeowners or school district officials to implement changes. Never let kids wait in a house or car, where the driver may miss seeing them approach the bus.
- Remind children that the bus stop is not a playground. Balls or other toys can roll into the street and horseplay could result in falling into the path of oncoming traffic.
- Instruct children to stay at least three steps away from the road and allow the bus to come to a complete stop before approaching it.

On the Bus Ride

- When boarding the bus, items can get bumped and dropped. Caution children that before picking anything up, they should talk to the driver and follow instructions to safely retrieve their possessions.
- Teach safe riding habits: stay seated with head, hands and feet inside at all times; use a seatbelt (if available); keep bags and books out of the aisle and remain seated until the bus stops moving. Also instruct children to never throw things on the bus or out the windows and to never play with or block the emergency exits.
- Remind kids that yelling and other loud noises are off limits as they could distract the driver.
- If cell phones and other electronic devices are permitted, instruct children to mute the sound or use headphones so as not to create a distraction for the driver or other riders.

Leaving the Bus

- Remind children to look before stepping off the bus. If they must cross the street, teach them to do so in front of the bus by taking five big steps from the front of the bus, making eye contact with the driver and waiting for the signal that it is safe to begin crossing.
- For parents who meet their kids at the bus stop, remember that in their excitement kids may dart across the street. Eliminate the risk by waiting on the side of the street where kids exit the bus.
- Make the bus ride part of your daily "how was school?" discussion. Encourage kids to talk about the things they see and hear on the bus so you can discuss appropriate behaviors and, if necessary, report any concerns to school administrators.



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Discuss the Bus

Join the discussion (or start one) on school districts exploring a switch from diesel buses to cleaner alternatives by downloading resources including fact sheets, videos and more at BetterOurBuses.com.

A Safe Transportation Option



Beyond teaching safety precautions around the bus, there is another option to ensure kids are transported safely to and from school each day. Many school districts are moving away from noisy, pollution-inducing and expensive diesel buses in favor of buses powered by an alternate fuel, like propane, which offers numerous benefits for school districts and their students.

Safety: Jenna Bush Hager, a teacher, author, journalist and parent of two, has partnered with the Propane Education & Research Council to educate parents and school districts about the benefits of propane school buses.

School buses powered by propane offer numerous safety advantages. Propane school buses are quieter than diesel buses when operating, making it easier for drivers to hear both inside and outside the bus. This can have a direct impact on student behavior, and many districts have reported fewer disciplinary issues as a result. An interactive audio quiz detailing the difference between the types of buses can be found at QuieterSchoolBuses.com.

"As a former teacher, I know parents often overlook how the ride to and from school can impact a child's performance in the

classroom," Hager said. "A child's attitude or behavior before they arrive at school can set the tone for the whole day."

In addition, these buses meet rigorous U.S. Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards and each is equipped with an automatic shut-off feature that prevents fuel flow to the engine when not running.

Another safety consideration is the health implications of older diesel buses. The shorter height of younger students can put them face-to-face with a black cloud of diesel smoke every school day. With propane buses, however, students aren't exposed to the harmful particulate matter in diesel exhaust, which is known to aggravate asthma and has been identified by the World Health Organization as a carcinogen. However, "low-NOx" propane engines are 75 percent cleaner than current federal emissions standards require.

Savings: Not only is propane consistently less expensive than diesel fuel, the buses themselves don't require the same expensive repairs and replacement parts that today's modern diesel buses demand. Saving money on transportation costs puts schools in a better position to appropriate budget toward meeting students' needs in the classroom and other areas, such as fine arts and athletic programs.