

Best Practices for Passenger Behavior Management on the School Bus

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Prepared by the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), in partnership with members of the Utah Association for Pupil Transportation (UAPT), to offer various best practice recommendations for the safe environment needed on a school bus.

We recognize that all discipline issues are different. All behavior, whether positive or negative, is motivated by an attempt to meet a set of human needs: survival, freedom, self-esteem, belonging, and power. Developing a positive behavior support system and identifying the bus safety rules and procedures, is the basis to eliminating problem behaviors.

- It is imperative that the driver of a school bus knows the difference between positive and negative behaviors, and the interventions necessary to encourage or discourage a behavior.
- A school bus driver must be familiar not only with the rules, but must also know and understand them in order to enforce them.
- A school bus driver must not change the rules according to his/her attitude at the time.
- A school bus driver must recognize the individual environmental differences in the students he/she is transporting, i.e., what behaviors may be acceptable in the child's home?

The following practices are designed for the continued improvement of safety on the school bus:

1. Drivers should introduce the rules and expectations to students the first week of transportation. Using a student who has ridden the bus and is familiar with the rules and expectations is a great resource. This student can demonstrate to the other passengers the correct meaning of a rule, if necessary.
 - a. The student should be confident and trustworthy.
 - b. The student should be able to explain the rule.
 - c. The student should be able to demonstrate the rule. (Ex: sitting properly in the seat)
 - d. The student should know the difference between positive and negative behavior.
2. Drivers should know specific strategies that will create an atmosphere of consistency and mutual respect between themselves and the students, also students to other students.
3. Drivers should be familiar with procedures for dealing with inappropriate or unacceptable student behavior that creates emergency conditions, or poses a risk to health and safety.
4. A driver who is positive and understanding, who models the appropriate behaviors, who acts instead of reacting, will be more adept at creating the desired climate of safety on the bus.
 - a. How much noise can the driver tolerate?
 - b. Does it always have to be quiet?
 - c. How much noise is too loud to be safe on the bus?
 - d. Some students are very sensitive to excessive or loud noise.
5. A driver must verify that students of all ages understand the rules.
 - a. Younger students, or students with special needs, may have smaller vocabularies, use words they will understand.
 - b. All students are not at the same learning level. A driver may have to address the issue physically and verbally.

- c. You may have to demonstrate the rules, for example, sitting down properly. Some see sitting on their knees as sitting down properly, others may be sitting but turned backwards in their seat.
 - d. Explain why the rules must be followed.
6. Spend the first two or three weeks of school becoming acquainted with the students.
 - a. Use of a seating chart is a driver's greatest asset in learning names.
 - b. This is a good time to ensure the students understand the rules as well.
7. Verify all students understand the rules and can identify/recognize when they or other students need some clarification of a rule.
 - a. This is not to tattle, but an assistance to others to help achieve compliance with the rules and a safer bus ride.
 - b. To tattle is to get someone in trouble, telling is to help someone avoid trouble.
8. Confirm to all students that bus safety rules are the same for everyone, not just those students who tend to be more active.
 - a. The rules apply to the driver as well as the students.
 - b. Driver should never have obvious favorites.
9. Listen and answer every question that arises. This encourages students to communicate with the driver and know they are being heard.
10. A driver should know techniques and procedures for response to unacceptable behavior, including possession and transportation of weapons, drugs, etc. A driver should also be aware of gang activities, harassment, bullying and/or other inappropriate behaviors.
11. Successful rules are few in number and written in a positive manner; "You are safe when the bus is moving and you are sitting down" instead of "Do not stand up when the bus is moving." This way you have eliminated the question "why" before it can be asked. You have also eliminated the negative with a positive reinforcement.
12. Action strategies should never be aggressive, this will only escalate the situation and may trigger an acting out situation -- which is what you are trying to avoid. Your goal as a driver is to stop the behavior and regain control with a calm voice, verbal directives, appropriate gestures and verbal praise.

Summary:

School bus drivers who know, understand, and teach students the rules for safe transportation on the bus, will be respected and have control of their bus each day. Students who know and understand the rules will be much safer on the ride to and from their school. Those students will arrive to school in a frame of mind to learn and achieve their goals.