

Taking Control:

Discipline Strategies

Discipline on school buses is the biggest problem confronting school bus drivers. You are responsible for the conduct of your students on the bus, and the school bus is an extension of the school. Therefore, you must have the support of the school principal to effectively manage behavior on your bus.

The following strategies can help you prevent and control discipline problems on your bus:

- Do not threaten the entire bus for the transgressions of a few.
- Individual behavior problems that do not affect other riders are best handled privately.
- Avoid threats or physical force.

When a discipline problem is serious:

- Do not try to handle it yourself. Refer it to the school principal and your supervisor.
- Stop the bus in a safe place, stand up and speak to the offender(s) in a courteous but “I mean business” tone.
- If you must change a student’s seat, move the student to a front seat near you.
- If necessary, call the principal or your supervisor. Do not start the bus until you get a response.
- If you are near the school, return to school.

When loading elementary students at the school, getting out of your seat and facing students helps maintain control and sets the tone for the ride home.

Wayne Scott, Brighton Public Schools, Colo.

Avoid ‘Never Land’

There are some things you never want to do while transporting students on your bus:

- Never put a student off your bus.
- Never lose your temper.
- Never use physical force.
- Never use profanity.

The Union’s Role in Supporting Bus Drivers

Your local union leaders can be a great support and resource for you on student discipline problems. They will advise you to:

- Keep copies of all referrals you have made to the school administration.
- Maintain notes on problems you have had with any students and/or their parents or guardians.
- Call the union for guidance if you are asked to attend any type of meeting about any type of discipline problem with a student.
- Work through the union to get training for all drivers on managing student behavior.
- Advocate for a voice for school bus drivers in the development of district- and school-level discipline policies, codes of conduct and emergency plans.

Resources

AFT’s Educational Research & Dissemination Program on Managing Antisocial Behavior.

Many of the ideas and tips in this brochure come from this highly acclaimed, research-based program. We encourage school bus drivers to be involved in their union and advocate for increased professional development for all school support staff.

If you have questions about district discipline policies, or want to gain support from the school administration for your concerns, contact your local union for assistance.



American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue,
NW
Washington, DC 20001
PSRP Division



Managing Student Behavior on the School Bus

A KEY TO BUS SAFETY



School buses are the safest form of mass transit in America.

Every day, school buses travel through congested city traffic and on isolated country roads in all types of weather, safely transporting millions of children to and from school and school-related activities. Federal and state standards for school bus construction and maintenance and highly trained drivers are essential elements that make school bus travel safe. A third and equally important factor is student behavior on the bus. A well-trained school bus driver can safely operate a bus and effectively manage student behavior.



A school bus is like a classroom. Just as a teacher is in charge of what happens in the classroom, the bus driver is in charge of what happens on the school bus. Safely transporting students requires appropriate student behavior.

Managing Behavior

Acceptable and unacceptable behavior must be clearly spelled out, including consequences for unacceptable behavior. Inappropriate behavior on a school bus can have potentially fatal consequences. For example, when the driver looks into the rearview mirror to identify and correct student behavior, who is driving the bus? Safe and appropriate behavior is the expectation, and nothing less should be acceptable.

Ideally, managing or controlling student behavior on the school bus is a team effort involving the driver, principal and parents. The goals are to ensure a safe ride to and from school and to help

schoolchildren develop appropriate behavior over the long haul. We can influence a student's behavior by how we respond to it. Three strategies to accomplish this are positive reinforcement, extinction and punishment.

Positive reinforcement is one of the most powerful ways of influencing behavior. Positive reinforcement is doing something immediately after a behavior that will increase the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. Praise students who are behaving well or helping. Saying to John, "I like the way you wait quietly in line to get off of the bus," increases the odds that he will repeat this behavior.

Extinction is ignoring behavior that is annoying or attention-getting, but not dangerous. The rationale behind extinction is that by consistently ignoring the behavior, it will cease. Dangerous behavior should never be ignored. If there is dangerous behavior on the bus, the best recourse is to pull over and call for help—via two-way radio or cell phone to the bus depot, or even by yelling for assistance from the window. If necessary, you may need to get other students away from the offender. This is a very good reason to practice emergency bus evacuation procedures, which all districts should have in place as part of their emergency plans.

Punishment is a penalty imposed for wrongdoing, which usually causes a behavior to lessen or cease. Reprimands, denying privileges, sending a student to the back of the line and suspension from the bus are forms

of punishment. Using punishment can cause some students to retaliate against the driver or continue their misbehavior. Therefore, punishment is not the best way to correct behavior. However, punishment can work when it is part of a behavior management plan that spells out the consequences for inappropriate behavior or for behavior infractions.

Why Do You Need Rules?

For students, riding the school bus is a privilege that is contingent upon their continuous observance of bus rules and established regulations.

- Rules establish expectations for acceptable behavior and safety on the school bus.
- Many of the rules that students observe on the school bus are the same rules they follow in school.
- Rules should be reviewed with students on the first day of school and routinely throughout the year.
- Rules should be simple, realistic and enforceable, and should be posted where everyone can see them.
- Rules should be short and stated positively to



promote good behavior.

- Enforce the rules consistently and equitably. Be sure your students know and understand each rule.
- Students should take a copy of the rules home to be reviewed with parents, signed and returned.

Expect safe behavior and accept nothing less.

Communication is Key

When you are speaking to students, there are two forms of communication you can use. They are alpha and beta commands.

Alpha commands are clear, concrete and specific, and allow a reasonable time for behavior to occur: "John, sit in your seat on the count of three!"

Beta commands are vague and wordy, containing too many directives and not enough time for compliance: "John, sit down right now! Why don't you behave like everyone else? Don't say anything and look straight ahead! You just won't be obedient. Come up here and sit near me!" Beta commands are typically used when people feel frustrated and angry. Beta commands should especially be avoided when communicating with students who have problems complying with directions.

I treated my students fairly and I expected them to treat me with respect.

Dee Wheeler, retired school bus driver, Gates-Chili, New York

Setting the Tone:

Prevention Strategies

You set the tone for your bus much the same way that teachers set the tone for their classrooms. Many students bring baggage other than their backpacks when they board the bus in the morning or head home after a long day. Both are opportunities for inappropriate behavior, but the tone of your bus could make the difference.

Here are some strategies:

- Greet every student boarding your bus every day.
- Get to know students' names as soon as possible.
- Set an example of courtesy and friendliness.