

Are You Behaving On The Bus?

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Too often we hear about children misbehaving while riding the school bus. You probably know of children who have been suspended from riding the bus because of inappropriate behavior, fighting, swearing, throwing things, or worse. Chances are parents with middle or high school children who ride school buses have experienced these situations or at least are aware of incidents with friends or neighbors. We wish that these incidents were rare, but unfortunately, they are becoming the rule.

Children arrive home in the afternoons scraped up from altercations on the bus, or tell stories of the kid who pull out a pocketknife, and how scared they were observing high school students fighting. What is going on inside school buses today? We must all ask ourselves if school personnel, parents, and transportation organizations are being proactive enough in managing student behavior on buses, or are the adults just part of the problem.

Studies have shown that the key to success and to a smooth transportation operation is communication with parents, students, and school personnel.

As a director in the school transportation industry, it has become very clear how critical it is for transportation companies to teach bus drivers and monitors "dealing with conflict" techniques. This should be an annual, recurring training topic. It does not matter if drivers operate a van or a 71-passenger bus, the key is preparation.

FIRST Drivers need to get to know their students. Learn your students' names. Smile and greet them by name each time they get on the bus. Let them know that you're interested in them.

SECOND Be a positive role model. Be friendly and polite. Say "please" and "thank you." Show your riders the behavior that you would like to see from them. Compliment them when they're behaving well.

THIRD Respect students' personal space. Students have little personal space on a school bus. Be sure that you don't crowd them any more than is necessary. And if you have to approach a student, do not threaten them by "getting in their space."

FOURTH Be aware of body language. Body language includes posture, movement, gestures, and facial expressions. As students board the bus, watch for signs that a student might be anxious or upset. Be aware of your own body language.

FIFTH Establish rules. Keep your rules short and simple. If you have too many rules, students won't remember them. State your rules in a positive way. Give a written copy of your rules to all riders and post them on the bus, too.

SIXTH set limits when rules are broken. When a student breaks a rule, tell the student what rule has been broken and why that rule is important. Then, set limits. Setting limits means that you provide the student with choices and with the consequences of those choices. Stress the choice you prefer the student to make.

SEVENTH Remain calm. Even when students are belligerent or insulting, don't allow them to "push your buttons." If you lose control, it will make the situation worse.

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Keep everyone on your bus safe.

Dealing with students' behavior on buses is not an easy job. Having a plan to deal with difficult behavior will help keep control, maintain a professional environment, and most importantly, keep everyone on your bus safe.