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LOADING, UNLOADING AND ON-BUS PROCEDURES

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1. Loading, Unloading and Transporting Students

INTRODUCTION

Much of the problem surrounding loading, unloading and transporting students results from the lack of control which an operator is able to exert over students and other motorists. If an inattentive motorist neglects to stop while the bus is displaying the 8 way flashing lights, there is nothing the driver can do to prevent it at the time. Similarly, it becomes difficult to keep any school age child from darting away from the bus at the end of the school day. What the driver can do, however, is recognize potentially hazardous situations and take action to prevent them before they happen.

General Procedures for Loading and Unloading

Prior to stopping:

1. Check your rear view mirrors continuously as you drive and pay particular attention when you know a school bus stop is coming up. Get a good reading of the traffic patterns for both following and oncoming vehicles.
 - Is traffic relatively clear?
 - Can the stop be made with little or no hazard?
 - Is there a long line of vehicles following that have not had an opportunity to get by?
 - Does the driver following appear impatient or anxious to get by?
2. If there is traffic following and you have an opportunity to let it pass, do so by slowing down well before the stop, signaling your intentions and pulling well to the right. Do not drive on shoulder area.
3. The operator of a school bus shall activate the alternately flashing amber lights when he begins to slow down the school bus for the purpose of stopping on a highway to load or unload passengers. This will give other drivers

ample warning of your intention to activate the alternating flashing red lights. (Once the bus is stopped, opening the door cancels the flashing amber lights and the alternating red lights are activated along with the stop arm and crossing arm if applicable).

4. When stopping to pick up, choose a location that gives the students safe footing and is at least 1 metre away from the waiting students. Children often want to be first in line, causing a lot of pushing and shoving increasing the possibility of one being shoved under the bus.

Once the bus is stopped:

5. Secure the bus by maintaining pressure on the brake pedal. This is a must!
6. Left mirror check. Check for vehicles approaching from the rear.
7. Rear view mirror check. Ensure students are seated.
8. Right mirror check.
9. Left mirror and shoulder check. Double check for last minute vehicles.
10. Open door. This will activate the alternating red lights, stop and cross over arms.
11. Signal students. Place hand at top of steering wheel and establish eye contact with student(s). Indicate with a hand gesture when it's OK to cross. By leaving your hand on the steering wheel, you will not confuse other motorists into thinking you are waving them on. For unloading, students must walk 10 paces along the shoulder of the road from the front of the bus. Prior to crossing, the driver signals them to proceed. Students should continually watch for traffic while crossing.

12. Check and re-check crossover mirror. Make sure all students are seated and take one final look in the mirrors to ensure no stragglers are around the bus. When unloading, count students as they get off the bus and again when they reach their safety zone which we'll discuss later.

13. Close the door. This will deactivate the alternating red lights and allow motorists to pass while the students are safe in the bus or in the safety zone.

14. Signal left, shoulder check and when safe to do so, pull back into traffic.

SAFETY ZONES

Some school jurisdictions have found that designating safety zones for the students has helped make the loading and unloading process safer. At each pick up or drop off point, a specific safe spot is chosen and the student(s) are expected to wait only at that spot for the bus. Once dropped off, the student(s) should go directly to the safety zone and wait there until the bus leaves. The bus, in turn, will not approach or leave the pick up or drop off location until the student(s) is standing in the safety zone.

In selecting a safety zone ensure:

- The site selected is readily visible to the driver
- It is accessible by the student(s) and allows safe footing
- That the student(s) understand the use of the safety zone

In rural areas, where student(s) must cross in front of the bus, two safety zones should be selected for each stop:

- One, when passengers are waiting to be loaded; and
- One, when passengers are to be unloaded

Most of the time, this will be quite straight forward however, there are times where traffic conditions, road conditions, congested areas etc. will increase the potential for creating a hazardous situation.

HAZARDOUS SITUATIONS

You must always be prepared for the unexpected while loading and unloading because so much is dependent on other drivers and the students. Common courtesy and extreme caution are advised in all situations, such as:

When Traffic is Following the Bus

This is an occurrence which becomes more hazardous on poor highways which do not easily facilitate passing. At such times other drivers may become impatient and anxious and eventually angry. Whenever you can, allow the built up traffic to pass by moving to the right of your lane to give them better visibility and possibly facilitate passing or pulling off the highway. It may take a couple of extra minutes, but greatly reduces the risk of having a driver pass during the loading and unloading process. Also, allow a driver to pass when they are driving erratically or appear inattentive. Do not drive on the shoulder area.

Allow traffic to proceed **before** you resume your position on the highway. School bus operators have been criticized for pulling back into traffic before turning off the alternating lights, thus, "trapping" traffic behind them. The courtesy you show other users of the road will make it a safer place for everyone.

When Driving in Urban Areas

The students wait until the bus drives away so they have better visibility before crossing the street. Always, always use caution! If any stops are near or at an intersection, it is safer to proceed through the intersection and then drop students off.

Instruct students to cross behind the bus preferably walking back to the corner or to a crosswalk if available.

Instruct students to wait until the bus has left and visibility is clear.

- Be patient (e.g., do not open the door for students to leave the bus if there appears to be a traffic hazard)
- Exercise extreme caution at all times
- Maintain an orderly procession
- Be certain the students know the proper pedestrian rules of the road, reinforcing them often

Urban drivers should also make use of the safety zones. Remind the students:

- In the mornings, arrive at the pick up point 5 minutes prior to their scheduled pick up time; and
- In the afternoon, after exiting the school bus, remain at the drop-off point until the school bus has left.

In School Yards

School yards, particularly at the end of the day, can present special hazards. Typically, the yard is filled with hundreds of students. If this is the case, proceed with caution to the pick up or drop off location and, if necessary, stop completely before reaching the designated stop and wait for the “excitement” to subside. Some schools have instituted special procedures or have assigned supervisors to assist in loading and unloading at the school. Give your fullest cooperation to these people in carrying out the procedures they have instituted.

For these reasons, buses should be in position for the afternoon pick up prior to the dismissal of students from classes. Keep in mind that students who do not ride the buses also present a hazard as they may run in between buses or be in a rush to meet parents.

These are not the only loading and unloading situations you will face as a driver that involves a hazard to students or others. Therefore, it is essential that you constantly monitor what’s going on around the bus and be prepared for the unexpected.

TRANSPORTING STUDENTS

Designated Stops and Safety Zones

Students should enter and exit the bus at school loading stations and at highway stops in an orderly fashion and in accordance with your instructions such as:

- Without haste and loitering
- Without crowding, pushing and shoving
- Avoid playing on the roadway
- With regard for one’s own safety and the safety of others
- Do not cross in front of the bus unless directed to do so by the school bus operator

Students should be trained to stop when crossing in front of the bus if the driver sounds the horn to warn of hazards or traffic. At that point the student should have eye contact with the driver.

Stay Seated

Students should go directly to their seat upon entering the bus and remain seated while the bus is in motion and:

- Remain seated until the bus has come to a complete stop and the driver opens the door indicating they may leave
- The driver should not put the bus into motion until the student(s) are safely seated

Additional Articles

Students must not bring additional articles on board the school bus that cannot be stored safely by the operator. If the bus is equipped with underbody compartments, hockey equipment, skates, etc. can be stored there.

If students do bring articles make sure they:

- Are stored under the seats where possible
- Do not block the aisles or emergency exits
- Are stored, lodged or secured in such a manner so that they cannot be dislodged or move about when the brakes of the school bus are applied, during acceleration of the school bus or in the event of an accident involving the school bus.

No person shall, while transporting pupils on a school bus, convey in or on the bus:

- Animals
- Firearms
- Explosives
- Flammable materials or substances
- Fuel other than in the fuel system and fuel tank of the bus
- Anything of a dangerous or objectionable nature
- Endanger the lives or safety of person on the bus

Appropriate Clothing

Students should wear clothing that is appropriate to the outside weather;

- As a driver, do not take it upon yourself to send a child home. Talk to the principal or your supervisor about your concerns
- Inappropriately dressed students may be a safety concern if there was a collision or breakdown requiring evacuation.

Remember that students as well as their parents will need to be reminded often of the procedures for loading and unloading. A professional operator never becomes complacent during this process as a child's life is too much to risk for one moment of inattentiveness.



"Want to hear something scary? This is the third time this week I've gotten off the bus and still remember what I learned."

2. Student Management

INTRODUCTION

As a professional school bus operator your main objective is to safely transport to their destinations. Your job demands far more than just driving the bus along a predetermined route. Regardless of how good an operator you may be technically, if you frequently encounter student behavior problems while you are driving, the safety of you and your passengers can quickly be jeopardized. In this section, we will be dealing with a few ways in which you can positively influence your passengers to carry out safe busing procedures, allowing you to do your job more easily and effectively.

OPERATOR OBJECTIVES

As a key member of the student transportation system, you are expected to perform your job in a safe manner that is conducive to good relationships between you and your passengers. You will never have all your passengers behave exactly as you wish for every trip. However, there are ways to encourage, reinforce or discourage certain types of behavior. In order to do this, there are three objectives related to student management that you should seek to attain.

1. To develop an atmosphere of friendly cooperation and a sense of responsibility between operator, passenger, parent and school
2. To firmly establish, from the start, procedures and rules for loading and unloading, and conduct on the bus
3. To be able to deal with and resolve “conflict” situations when they arise.

PROFESSIONALISM

Operator professionalism will go a long way to developing an atmosphere of friendly cooperation between students, parents, school and driver. Professionalism shows up in many areas:

Appearance

An individual who takes the time for personal grooming and care of their bus sends a strong message to students that they care about their job and the students they are transporting. A sloppy driver equals sloppy driving habits.

Attitude

Attitude can make the difference between an enjoyable ride and disaster. Having respect for your passengers will earn you respect in return. Remember that you are dealing with various age groups, from different backgrounds and at various stages of their lives. Your attitude can have a great deal of influence in their life. Similarly, their attitude can greatly influence your job from one day to the next. As the adult, you need to take the initiative with a positive attitude starting with a simple “good morning” or “how was your day?”. In dealing with students, a good sense of humour can be a wonderful attribute! Smile!

Operator Conduct

Setting a good example for students will encourage them to behave as such:

- Be on time. If you are never on time at their pick up point, you cannot expect that your passengers will be on time for you
- Speak in a normal tone of voice. Not raising your voice will encourage them to do the same
- Be respectful of your passengers’ needs and concerns
- Allow them to make mistakes and correct them as soon as possible
- Leave your personal problems at home, focusing on your job
- Deal professionally with students, parents and the school when conflicts arise

ESTABLISHING RULES

In order to drive safely to and from school you need to have passengers under control. Without rules, this is not possible. As an operator, you have a right to expect students to follow the rules of your bus.

Rules should be:

- Concise and easy to understand for all ages
- Very specific telling the students exactly what they are to do
- Limited in number

What do you expect from your students?

Once the rules have been established, it is important to discuss with your students what is expected of them in respect to their bus behavior. It is very difficult for a child to follow rules they do not understand or rules that are different from those at home. Therefore, the rules should be:

- Discussed with students (they may need to be reminded from time to time)
- Sent home to parents
- Posted in the bus
- Discussed with the school staff and appropriate supervisor

Consequences

Along with rules go consequences. What will you do if a student breaks a rule? This may depend on the severity, the number of previous offences as well as the situation. Remember, there may be two sides to the story and you may need more information. Establishing consequences ahead of time will give the driver a plan of action.

Consequences should be:

- Something the students do not like
- Something you are comfortable with

- Not physically or psychologically harmful to students
- Used only to enforce the rules
- Posted in the bus and discussed with students, parents, school staff
- Arranged by severity from minor to most severe
- *Always* followed through with

Consequences must also contain a severe clause for severe behavior that must be dealt with instantly to protect others on the bus. Pulling the bus over or returning to the school may be necessary to deal with severe problems. Consult with your supervisor on the best way to handle individual problems.

Rewards

Since students who misbehave have consequences, students who do behave should have positive rewards. Positive rewards can change the atmosphere of an entire bus and make students look forward to the ride on your bus. Positive rewards can be:

- Something the students like
- Age appropriate such as stickers, music or praise by the driver
- Never taken away
- Best positive reward is praise

“Catch kids being good!”

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

How can you, as an operator, deal with the conflicts that arise in a professional manner and not “lose your cool”? We have established operator conduct, rules, consequences and positive rewards so that the driver has an action plan. Putting that plan into action requires additional skills.

The assertive operator:

- Is self-assured, stays calm and uses normal tones (with authority) and volumes in speech. They do not yell, scream or name call
- Say what they mean, mean what they say and do what they say
- Is always prepared to handle any behavior problems that occur on their bus
- Takes the attitude that “No student will stop me from driving a safe bus”
- Takes the attitude that “No student will stop the other passengers from having a safe and pleasant trip”

Learn to use the “broken record” method to prevent arguments:

- Know what you want the student to do
- Tell the student what you want
- If an argument ensues, repeat what you want, up to three times
- If the student still does not do it, then use a consequence

Keep In Contact With Parents and the school

Many times problems on a bus can be corrected with a simple call to parents who can assist in your discipline plan. If a different seating arrangement in the bus and a call to parents does not change the behavior problem, then the school needs to be informed. This can be done with a conference with the principal or with a misconduct report form. Keeping in contact with parents and the school also means informing them of good student behavior particularly if a student’s behavior has improved.

Using Misconduct Reports

As an operator, you do not have the authority to suspend a student’s busing privileges. Serious behavior problems cannot be solved on a school bus. In situations that are severe, such as drugs, alcohol, smoking or injuring another child, a suspension of bus privileges is usually recommended by the operator and enforced by the school. Always touch base with the school administration and your supervisor as soon as possible.

Discipline Must Be Consistent

The same rules and consequences apply for everyone, every day.

Allow The Student to Make a Choice

It is the student’s decision to behave or not behave according to the rules of the bus. Thus, they have a choice and ownership of the problem. You may help them make the correct choice and suggest a solution to the problem but ultimately it is their choice.

Guidelines to Dealing With Conflicts:

- Tell the student what they have done wrong
- Give the student a way to solve the problem
- Let the student make the choice to behave or face consequences
- Leave the dignity of the student and driver intact

You may not be able to solve all conflicts and behavior problems on your bus.

Keep in mind however, that your main objective is the operation of a safe bus to deliver students to their destination. While discipline problems can make a good operator quit, a great operator deals with the problems in a professional manner.