

School Bus Loading and Unloading

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, in every crash involving a child being struck by a school bus, driver error was indicated when the driver “lost” sight of the child during loading or unloading. If the driver had done the job correctly, the student wouldn’t have been struck. Drivers should consider the following suggestions to ensure that the loading and unloading of the school bus is done safely.

- Before you start your trip, inspect the bus to make sure there are no problems with the equipment. Make sure that the mirrors are properly adjusted so you can see what you are supposed to see.
- Loading and unloading requires all your concentration. If you are running late on a route, don’t hurry. Check all mirrors slowly and carefully, especially as you move away from a stop.
- Stay to the right side of the roadway when loading and unloading. Don’t try to block all traffic. Stay in the traffic lane, not on the shoulder (unless your state/local laws or procedures say differently). Stop before you get to the students. Make them walk to you so you can see them.
- Secure your bus whenever you load or unload - set the emergency brake and put the bus in neutral. Assure that all safety-devices have been activated.
- Back up only when absolutely necessary. If you MUST back up near a bus stop, keep all students on the bus. Use a lookout — a reliable student inside the bus or a bus attendant outside the bus. Open your window and sound your horn. Back up VERY slowly.
- Use a hand signal or head nod to tell the students when it is safe to cross the street. The hand signal should not be confused with a wave because waiting motorists might think you are telling them to pass. Or, use the external public address system, if you have one. Teach the students what horn signal you will use to signal danger. The signal will mean to “return to the side of the road they started from — AT ONCE!”
- Know how many students should get ON at a stop; count them. If any are missing, ask if they were at the bus stop. If yes, secure the bus, and check around and underneath the bus.
- As the students get OFF at a bus stop, count them. Then, before you move the bus, count them again as they move away. Don’t move until you are sure that they are all away from the bus. If you can’t account for a student outside the bus, secure the bus, and check around and underneath the bus.
- Watch for stragglers (students who don’t cross with the group) or students running for a missed bus. Check the bus at the end of a run to assure no students fell asleep in the bus. If a student drops something outside the bus, make sure they tell you and follow your instructions for retrieving the item. Clothing, drawstrings, and straps can catch in handrails, doors, the step outside the door, fire extinguishers, etc. Make sure all children are clear of the bus before moving off.

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- Assume the worst from approaching motorists. Even though they are supposed to stop, motorists may pass a stopped school bus. Make a record of anyone who passes illegally and give it to your supervisor.
- Constantly search for traffic, in front, in back, and on both sides of the bus. Make sure that you give plenty of warning that you are going to stop by turning on your yellow flashers early. Don't let the students off until you are sure it is safe. If you hear an emergency vehicle's siren and students are UNLOADING, make sure all students are out of the danger zone, then turn-off the bus' flashers. If you hear a siren and students are STILL ON the bus, do not allow students off the bus.
- Expect the unexpected. Watch for unusual hazards as you approach a bus stop. Report the hazardous situation on your radio. Only let the students off the bus if you and they feel it is safe. Trust your own judgment.

The loss prevention information and advice presented in this brochure are intended only to advise our insureds and their managers of a variety of methods and strategies based on generally accepted safe practices, for controlling potentially loss producing situations commonly occurring in business premises and/or operations. They are not intended to warrant that all potential hazards or conditions have been evaluated or can be controlled. They are not intended as an offer to write insurance coverage for such conditions or exposures, or to simply that Great American Insurance Company will write such coverage. The liability of Great American Insurance Company is limited to the specific terms, limits and conditions of the insurance policies issued.
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