

School bus safety: Use caution around the bus stop

More than 24 million children, including a growing number of preschoolers, ride the bus every school day. A review of bus safety 101 means reminding kids about using caution in the area where they get on and off the bus. It is the most dangerous part of the trip.

While large, traditional school buses remain the safest form of school transportation, about 30 people die and 9,000 are injured in school bus incidents each year. Most fatalities occur in the "danger zone," the area surrounding the bus. Most victims are hit by an illegally passing vehicle or by the bus itself, usually in one of the driver's blind spots.

The following recent scenario is all-too-common: A 6-year-old stepped off her bus around 3:30 p.m. and crossed in front of the bus. There was a safety arm, but she either ducked under it or ran back toward the door, possibly after dropping something. She was in the driver's blind spot, and he said he never saw her until it was too late. The girl was run over and later died.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, most victims of bus accidents are between 5 and 7 years old. They can be in a hurry to get on or off the bus, act before they think, have little experience with traffic and assume people see them and will wait for them to cross the street. They quickly "disappear" from the bus driver's sight.

Parents can coordinate with others to ensure that an adult always is present at the bus stop. If problems occur, team up with the school's principal and transportation director, or enlist the local police to make sure safety laws are enforced.

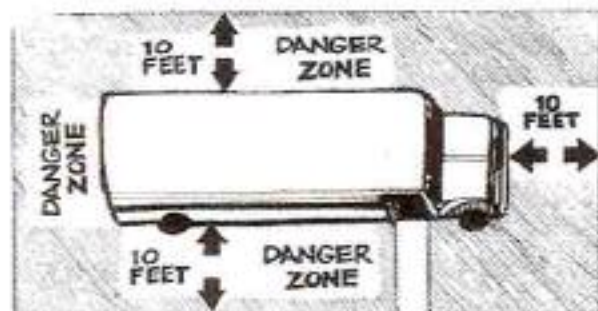
Parents also should review the following school bus safety guidelines with their children:

- Kids should stay at least 10 feet (five giant steps) away from the bus and never walk behind it.
- When crossing in front of the bus, children should be far enough forward to see and be seen by the bus driver.
- If children drop something on the street in front of the bus, they should alert the driver before picking it up.
- Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb.
- Stay seated while on the bus.
- Wait until the bus is fully stopped before getting off.
- Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing the street.

In addition, children should not wear clothing with drawstrings or use backpacks with dangling objects that can get caught on the bus.

Teach children to use safety restraints in buses that provide them. Although most school buses do not have seat belts, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the installation of seat belts on all newly purchased school buses.

— Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff



10 feet equals five giant steps.