

IPTA School Bus Stop



Iowa Pupil Transportation Association

Bully-Free School Bus

Safely driving a school bus in all types of weather and traffic conditions while managing 30-50 students of varying ages is an enormous challenge. The school bus driver and the students are required to follow the school bus rider rules established by the school district's written board policy. The rules may be worded differently but they are basically the same in all districts: remain seated, speak with an inside voice, keep your hands and feet to yourself and be nice.

All drivers and students understand the rules and drivers can clearly identify when a student is not in their seat, being too loud or not keeping their hands to themselves. School bus drivers are trained and have district transportation procedures in place to appropriately deal with students not following safety rules on the bus. However, bullying behavior is becoming a larger part of the safety concerns that school bus drivers have to deal with on a daily basis. Bullying behaviors are covered in the district's basic rule structure, however this type of behavior is at times hard to deal with for a school bus driver. With your back to the children, and the main focus is on safe driving practices, traffic and road conditions it is very difficult to fully grasp and understand the whole picture when a bullying situation arises without warning.

Bullying Hurts...

inside
and
out!



The rules and regulations that you are empowered to enforce, as well as the manner in which you enforce them, also speak to the community. You should recognize and understand each student as an individual. Students respond in different ways to positive redirection, instruction or disciplinary measures. Parents and students appreciate drivers and bus associates who are consistent and have a set procedure for handling incidents. Treat all children fairly and follow all State & Federal laws and the Districts School Board Policy pertaining to discipline procedures.



Bullying behavior is a growing concern among educators not only in Iowa but across the country. Bullying is generally defined as repeated aggressive acts intended to do harm, and is characterized by a power or status difference between the students. Bullying includes not only physical aggression such as hitting or stealing, but also verbal aggression, such as threatening, name calling, spreading rumors, socially rejecting and isolating someone, or cyberbullying (where bullies can hide behind the anonymity of the Internet).

You may think that dealing with bullies is not part of your job as a bus driver, but it is! You will find it makes a difference in how well the bus ride goes for everyone, including you! Most children want strength, guidance, understanding and forgiveness from adults. Working in the role of a school bus driver you must understand that you are the adult on the bus. You are required to provide positive redirection and behavior management through good communication and seat assignment changes. When you do that effectively, you will find that students generally respect you for your effort.

Bullies tend to thrive on school buses where they have a small space, a captive audience and a bus driver whose focus is on the road. Add to that the contained environment of a school bus, a ride that can last up to 30 minutes or longer and very little supervision; you can see why buses are one of the top places where bullying takes place. To make matters worse, for the student it is impossible to walk away from a bully, which can leave a target of bullying feeling trapped and helpless. Victims of bullying often have no choice but to ride the bus. This makes them easy and regular targets of bullies. With the close quarters, other students can easily be drawn into the bullying either by succumbing to peer pressure and participating, or by becoming victims themselves. What's more, bullying on the bus is not left on the bus steps when students arrive at school. If they start their day on the receiving end of aggression, or even as the one being aggressive, this filters into the classroom. It can cause victims to fear going to school, and force them to focus on the intimidation they are experiencing rather than on learning. Even bystanders suffer the effects from bullying on the bus. Not only do they worry about becoming the next target, watching another person be bullied can have a lasting impact. So, what should be done to make the bus ride bully-free? Ensuring a safe ride to and from school is up to the students on the bus, their parents, the bus driver and the school district.



First, students should practice responsible bus riding behavior. This means sitting facing forward, talking quietly and being respectful to the driver and the other students. For students concerned about bullying, they should sit as close to the bus driver as possible and on the right-hand side of the bus so that they are visible to the driver. They also should consider pairing up with neighborhood friends and riding the bus together. It's also a good idea for kids to have ideas on how to respond to a bully before it happens. They can practice using humor, ignoring the bully or telling the bully to stop in a firm voice. If they do experience bullying, it's important that students report the behavior to an adult such as the bus driver, a parent, a teacher, a guidance counselor or even the principal. Kids should know what to do if they witness bullying. Standing up for a friend in a positive way can go a long way in preventing future bullying incidents.

What can the bus drivers and Schools do? Aside from assigned seating, bus drivers and school districts should have a strict code of conduct that specifically outlines what is expected of students on the bus and what will not be tolerated. For example, if students are required to follow a specific set of rules such as staying in seats, keeping their hands and feet to themselves and not leaning over seats to bother or talk to another person, then this will reduce the likelihood of bullying. Transportation departments should also consider installing cameras if they haven't done so already. Doing so allows school officials to not only monitor activity, but also follow up on complaints lodged by parents and students. When a bullying incident is confirmed, it's important that bus drivers and school district respond in a timely manner. There should be a set plan of action in place for how to handle various types of bullying incidents.



For instance,

- Calling another person names or taunting them results in being assigned a seat on the bus.
- The second offense the student should be written up and sent to the principal's office. Administrators know that bullying is greatly deterred when a bully knows there will be consequences for his/her behavior. When bullies realize they will have to face the principal when they get off the bus, they will think twice about bullying someone again.
- For the third offense the student is removed from the bus for the day and so on.
- Any student who is caught physically bullying another student or threatening violence in any way should be removed from the bus on the first offense for a set period of days. If the behavior continues, then the student is not permitted to ride the bus for the rest of the year.

The important thing is that bullying is never ignored. Even taunting, teasing, and name-calling should be addressed. The goal should be that students are calm and respectful on the bus so that the driver can get everyone to and from school safely.

To identify bullying behavior on your school bus be a good observer while monitoring your riders throughout the whole bus route. Behavior is any act, response, movement you can see or hear (observe) and measure. You can see when a student smiles, nods their head, laughs or is casually talking, etc. You can see when a student uses an obscene gesture or hear them when they yell out. Is the student yelling because of anger? Does the student simply want to get your attention? Is the student trying to warn somebody of danger or cheering a classmate? The point is that you cannot always know the motivation for a behavior. You can only observe and evaluate the behavior itself.

What should you look for on your bus route that could be signs that students are bullying other riders? If you see a student that is outnumbered or surrounded in their bus seat by students that are older, possible being more verbally or physical aggressive, not the student's usual group of friends. Watch for students leaning over seats with facial expressions that are not appropriate or welcoming. Listen for loud boisterous voices, name calling, verbal treats and yelling. Give more attention to students hanging their heads to avoid conflict, tears, students isolating themselves from other riders and physical threats or physical actions.

These are all signs that bullying is present on your school bus. It must be addressed by you the driver as the adult on the bus. Understand that the student being bullied or victimized is looking to any adult for assistance. Ask yourself what am I seeing and hearing? To begin to understand if a student is being bullied you have to look at the whole picture, observe and evaluate and then take appropriate action.

There are two ways for students to get attention, positive and negative. Most students generally choose positive ways of getting attention; they sit quietly and respond to directions appropriately. The reward they receive for this good conduct is a smile or verbal praise from the driver, which maintains their good behavior. If you consider that behavior is learned, you can help students learn new behaviors through the ways you react to them when they do something positive and when they misbehave. You cannot really change the way somebody behaves, but you can change how you react to that behavior. Reacting with positive redirection you may influence how the student chooses to behave in the future.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly a third of all students aged 12 – 18 reported having been bullied at school, some almost daily. When transporting students do everything in your power to avoid accidents, and without fail protect the well-being of your riders by relying on your experience, common sense and applied best judgment.





Tips for School Bus Drivers



To Intervene in Bullying

- Learn about bullying so you know what you're looking for.
- When you see something, do something - be assertive and calm.
- Start with positive verbal redirection. Use the name of the student who is bullying.
- If the behavior escalates, stop the bus in a safe place if you have to.
- Maintain control of yourself.
- Stand up and speak, clearly and calmly, to the involved students.
- Do not argue with or try to convince the student who is bullying.
- Separate and move affected students to new, safe seats.
- Call your school or dispatcher according to policy. Sometimes the call will stop the behavior.
- Report incidents as required by your school's policy.
- Notify appropriate school staff about what you've witnessed. Share your concerns about the students you drive, since they interact with the same students during the rest of the day.



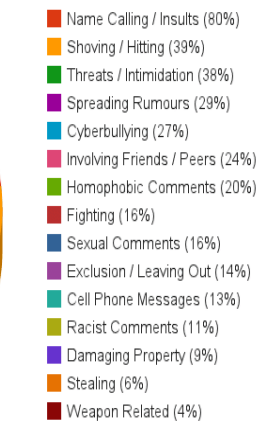
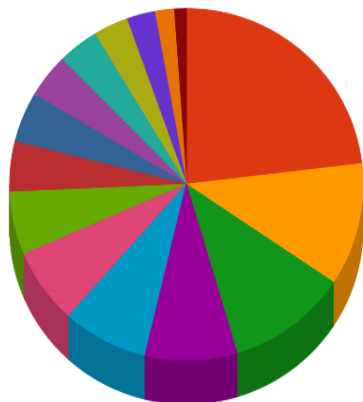
To Prevent Bullying

- Establish a positive atmosphere on the bus. Be **clear**, **fair**, and **consistent** about rules.
- Treat students the way you want to be treated and the way you want them to treat each other.
- Learn and use their names. Introduce yourself.
- Get to know all of the students on your bus - including the students who bully.
- Use positive, non-verbal interactions - smile, a nod, a thumbs up, a high five, a pat on the back.
- Notice something positive the students do and say something about it to them or someone else where they can hear it.
- If you regularly drive for a group like a sports team or club, get to know what they do. Go watch them in action and say something to them about it.
- Assign seats when needed and hold a discussion with the student. First, ask them why they have an assigned seat? Second, explain what behavior improvement you expect before they can return to their regular seating area!

Source: US Department of Education Safe and Supportive Schools Center

STOP A BULLY

TYPES OF BULLYING REPORTED



*Multiple types of bullying can be selected.

