



# 7

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Describe your role in managing student behavior along with common techniques you can use
- Discuss strategies and limitations when disciplining students
- Recognize the signs of bullying and the steps you can take to prevent or stop bullying

## Introduction

As the driver of a school bus, your job is to deliver your students safely to their destination. To do so, however, requires knowing much more than how to operate the vehicle. You will need to know how to prevent being distracted by your passengers and how to protect passengers from harm, whether physical or psychological. This means you must know how to manage student behavior. In most cases, you will be the only responsible adult on the vehicle, and will be the first non-family adult that students interact with each day. Your interaction with students sets the stage for their conduct for the rest of the day. In this chapter you will learn about techniques for managing student behavior on the bus to ensure that safety is maintained and the rights of others are respected.

## Behavior Management Roles

We all have roles to play and expectations to follow, including on a school bus. Under ideal conditions, students are expected to:

- Stay seated and keep their limbs and belongings within the confines of the seating compartment unless the bus is stopped
- Face forward
- Talk quietly and respectfully so as not to distract the driver



If students always followed these rules, your job would be much easier. However, students:

- Are in varying stages of physical and emotional development
- Are constantly exploring and adjusting
- May need help understanding what is acceptable and appropriate behavior on a school bus

Unlike many other locations, student behavior on a school bus has a direct bearing on the safety of every person on the bus. Students who act up or cause disruption could be putting everybody at risk, especially if they interfere with you—the driver—and your ability to drive the bus safely.

Your role as a people manager is especially important when you are the only adult on the bus.

For that reason, you must play a dual role: bus driver and people manager. Students need to learn how to control their actions, behaviors, and emotions, but when they don't—to the extent that safety might be affected—you must step in and address the situation.

## Reasonable and Acceptable

As the captain of your ship, you must recognize the difference between reasonable expectations and unreasonable expectations for student behavior. Students should be expected to follow the rules but not be models of perfect behavior at all times.

Reasonable Expectations	Unreasonable Expectations
To expect students to remain seated, because their own safety is put at risk if they move around while the bus is moving.	To expect students to sit still at all times.
To expect students to keep their arms and heads inside the bus.	To expect students to face forward at all times, even though it is safer.
To expect students to keep their voices low and their words respectful.	To expect complete silence from students.
To expect students to keep their belongings out of the aisle.	To expect students to always keep their arms and legs within the confines of the seating compartment.
To expect students to never throw things on or out of the bus.	To expect students to keep all items stowed in their backpacks or bags at all times.

Just because you think a rule or expectation is reasonable doesn't mean that it's easy to enforce! It takes time, repetition, and patience.

In general, students on a school bus will be protected in a crash due to "compartmentalization." This refers to the protective envelope surrounding each student, formed by strong, closely-spaced seats with energy-absorbing backs. For compartmentalization to work, students must be completely seated, fully in the seat, and facing forward.

Students must learn your expectations and adjust their behavior accordingly, until they know (and put into practice) the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Unacceptable behaviors that can jeopardize safety include:

- Pushing or shoving
- Running down the aisle
- Fighting or bullying
- Using loud and abusive language
- Throwing things
- Smoking or using drugs or alcohol
- Lewd, inappropriate, or sexual misconduct



- Vandalism
- Bringing weapons on the bus

## Rules & Consequences

Expect safe and appropriate behavior and accept nothing less.

Preventing these behaviors starts with rules, along with consequences for breaking them. Rules for acceptable and unacceptable behavior must be clearly spelled out and consistently enforced.

Why? Because unacceptable behavior on a school bus can have potentially fatal consequences. Whenever you are forced to address a student's behavior while driving, you're not focused on driving. Instead, you're focused on the student's behavior.

For students, riding the bus is a privilege that can be removed if they do not follow the rules.

- Rules set expectations for acceptable behavior and safety on the bus
- Many of the rules that students have to follow on the bus are the same ones they follow in school and other locations



You must enforce the rules that are in place in your district and/or company. In general, rules should be:

- Short, simple, realistic, and enforceable
- Posted on the bus, where everyone can see them
- Stated in a positive way, to promote good behavior
- Reviewed with students on the first day of school and routinely throughout the year
- Brought home to be reviewed with parents
- Enforced consistently and equitably

Don't set your students up to fail. Make sure they know and understand each rule before you begin enforcing it.

Consistent enforcement of the rules is key. Like anyone, your mood, your attitude, and your level of tolerance for bad or annoying behaviors will vary from day to day. However, your students won't understand if what was acceptable yesterday is not acceptable today. Your reaction to bad behaviors needs to be consistent so students develop appropriate behaviors over the long run.

## Developing Good Behaviors

You can avoid many behavioral problems on the bus, and encourage the development of good behaviors, by:

1. Recognizing good behavior and reinforcing it in a positive way
2. Understanding which behaviors require your attention and which ones are best ignored so you can focus on driving
3. Enforcing consequences when necessary

### Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is a powerful way to influence behavior. It involves taking action immediately after you spot good behavior, to increase the likelihood of that behavior being repeated. The goal is to reinforce good behaviors rather than focusing only on bad behaviors. Bad behaviors might be easier to spot and address in a negative way, but positive reinforcement is a much more effective way to improve behavior.

Learn to recognize desirable behaviors and respond to them with positive comments. Desirable behaviors might include:

- Picking up a piece of trash
- Offering to share a seat
- Being on time
- Using a handrail
- Waiting quietly in line



Praise is a powerful tool to reinforce these behaviors, and encourages other students to mimic the desirable behavior. Thanking a student for picking up a gum wrapper, for example, increases the odds that he or she will repeat the behavior in the future.

### Ignore Annoying Behaviors

You must immediately address behaviors that affect safety—or that might escalate into a bigger problem that affects safety—but choose your battles carefully and don't nitpick. Students engage in many behaviors that might be annoying or attention-getting but not dangerous. Sometimes, simply ignoring a behavior will make it go away. If it does not, you may want to address it one-on-one with the student, as long as you are consistent and equitable.

You or your school may use other forms of positive reinforcement, to make good behavior rewarding or even fun. For example, you might reward good behavior with a coupon that students may use to enter a drawing or “purchase” a reward.

## Discipline

At times, you may need to discipline students for wrongdoing, the same as a teacher might do in the classroom or a parent at home. If administered properly, discipline should cause a bad behavior to stop or lessen. Discipline might include:

- Verbally reprimanding a student
- Denying privileges
- Changing where students sit
- Contacting a student's school or parents
- Suspending a student from the bus



Discipline does not always work and can sometimes backfire—resulting in retaliation against the driver or continued misbehavior—so it needs to be administered appropriately and cautiously. It also needs to conform to any local policies.

There are some things you should never do in response to bad behavior, even if you think discipline is required.

- Never use physical force or grab, slap, hit, or shake a student
- Never put a student off the bus (away from their regular stop)
- Never lose your temper
- Never use profanity

Keep in mind that students need many of the same things that adults do, including:

- Respect
- Recognition
- To feel in control of their circumstances
- To associate with their peers
- To feel important to their peers

## Strategies for Disciplining Students

Discipline may be one of the hardest problems you face as a school bus driver. It requires “discipline” on your part, to stay in control of your emotions and remain calm, fair, and equitable in your response. You also must administer school rules and work with school administrators and parents in maintaining discipline among your students.

The following strategies can help you control discipline problems on your bus, and even prevent such problems from occurring. The strategies you use in any given situation will depend on the situation at hand.

- Don’t threaten or punish the entire bus when only one or a few students misbehave; be fair
- Use private conversations instead of reprimanding students in front of other passengers who were not involved
- Never threaten students or use physical force; with serious discipline problems, seek help from the school principal or a supervisor
- If necessary to address a serious behavioral problem while you are driving:

1. Stop the bus in a safe place
2. Engage the parking brake, turn off the engine, and remove the ignition key
3. Pause and relax for a few seconds to think about what you will do and say to control the situation



4. Stand up, face the students, and use a calm but authoritative voice to address the offender(s)
5. State specifically what you expect of the student(s), which behaviors are not acceptable, which rules they must follow, and what they must do to fix the situation, without humiliating them
6. If necessary, state the consequences of failing to follow your commands
7. Contact the principal or a supervisor for help if needed; in extreme cases, you may need to call the police

Though a firm verbal command may fix the problem, avoid getting into arguments or lengthy discussions while driving, and always stop if there is a fight or other serious problem.

Consequences must be supported by school policy and must be something you are willing to carry out. Don’t make false threats, and never put students off the bus as punishment.

8. Consider moving the offending student(s) to a front seat where you can observe him or her (but not in the seat directly behind you)
9. If you are near the school, return to the school as necessary
10. Document the incident and contact your supervisor

If your efforts are unsuccessful and a student's behavioral problem makes you feel that you cannot safely continue to drive the bus, call a supervisor, a school administrator, or even the police if necessary. They may need to come and remove the student. Follow your state or local procedures for requesting assistance in these situations.



*Whenever you are driving, don't let students' behaviors cause you to lose focus on the roadway or other drivers. A moment's distraction could result in a crash.*

## Critical Driving Tasks

Behavioral problems can arise at any time, but there are certain times when you must not allow the activities going on behind you to distract you from what's happening in front of you.

**Loading and unloading:** Never try to deal with behavioral problems during the loading or unloading process, which requires your full attention. Wait until students have finished loading or unloading and have reached a place of safety before turning your attention to other matters. If necessary, pull the bus over to handle the problem.

**Railroad tracks:** Stopping at railroad tracks is another situation when driving demands your full attention. You must follow specific procedures when approaching a railroad-highway grade crossing. These procedures demand all of your attention, and demand that students are quiet. Do not let a disturbance on the bus cause you to skip or rush through any of the procedures needed for crossing railroad tracks safely. Address the problem before you reach the crossing, or wait until you have crossed the tracks completely before trying to deal with it.

## Other Tips & Strategies

There are many tips and strategies you can use to prevent and/or address behavioral problems. Talk to other bus drivers about their strategies. The following list will get you started.

- Don't become too close or too tough with students. Your relationships should be friendly but firm.



- Smile and greet students by name. Say good morning or good afternoon. Show an interest in things that interest them. Your attitude can influence the attitude of your passengers.
- Have students use a formal title with your name: Mr. Jones, Mrs. Parker, etc.
- Show respect for students and try to gain their respect. Leave any biases at home.
- Try not to shout, show anger, or display irritation—to passengers or other drivers (i.e., “road rage”).
- Praise students who accept responsibility for their actions.
- Be consistent. Don’t be lax one day and tough the next.
- Listen to students—their suggestions, complaints, and concerns.
- Treat all students equally and fairly, or you may lose respect. Don’t have favorites.
- Be courteous and not sarcastic. Never ridicule a student or his or her family. Don’t exchange gossip with students.
- Always control your temper. Keep calm; don’t yell.
- When giving a command, use clear, direct, and concrete language. Tell students exactly what you need them to do. Avoid being vague and wordy.
- Clearly establish your expectations—what the rules are and the reasons they exist.
- Be alert to “minor” cases of rule-breaking, because they can easily grow into bigger problems.
- Stress to students that they each share in the responsibility to ensure safety on the bus.
- Pay attention to your appearance.
- Set a good example. Act the part of a person in a responsible position who follows the rules.
- Be honest in what you do and say.
- If you make a mistake, admit it.



- Remember your sense of humor.
- Don't hold grudges and don't take things personally.
- Watch your language.
- Communicate at the student's level: a kindergartner is different from a 5th grader who is different from a 9th grader.
- Consider using assigned seats and a seating chart if acceptable under district policy. A seating chart can help you learn students' names and help control student behavior. They can also help during an emergency when you—or a substitute driver—need to account for all passengers.
- Remember that you are not alone. Talk to other drivers and share experiences and solutions.
- Keep in mind that safety is your primary objective. Have an assertive attitude that puts safety first.

Bullying can be worse on a bus because there is less supervision, bullies may enjoy having an audience, and bullied students are not able to walk away from the situation.

## Bullying & Harassment

Bullying and harassment are serious issues that cannot be tolerated or ignored. They may be hard to spot and may not cause any immediate concerns for the safe operation of the vehicle, but they can cause emotional or physical harm to their victims and can quickly escalate into serious problems affecting safety on the bus.

If you respond quickly and consistently to bullying and harassing behavior, you send the message that it is not acceptable, which can help stop future bullying or harassing behaviors.

- **Bullying** is a behavior that harms or humiliates another person physically or emotionally. Bullying typically involves a "power imbalance," meaning the bullying student has (or is perceived to have) more physical, social, or emotional power than the person being bullied. Bullying behavior can range from stares and teasing to physical assault.
- **Harassment** is similar to bullying in that it involves unwanted and hurtful actions, but it includes an added element: disrespect for the victim(s) based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin.



There are numerous federal, state, and local laws and policies that may apply to harassing and bullying behavior, and schools have been sued for failing to stop bullying or harassing behavior.

Follow your school's policies and procedures for:

- Disciplining students who are bullying or harassing others
- Reporting incidents of bullying, so they can be addressed by school officials and parents

If you feel that YOU are being harassed or bullied, report the incident to your supervisor.

## Signs of Bullying

Sometimes bullying will be obvious—like a fight—and other times it will take keen observation to uncover. Not all students react the same way to bullying, and students who are being bullied may not be willing to ask you for help.

Bullying is usually more common among students in the fifth- to eighth-grade range.

If a student reports they were bullied, or if a parent reports to you that their child is being bullied on your bus, do not ignore it! Follow school policies for reporting and acting on bullying behaviors.

Some subtle signs of school-bus bullying to watch for include:

- Students who are afraid of getting on the bus, try to miss the bus, or have excuses for not riding the bus
- Students who are afraid or nervous about sitting with or near certain other students
- Students who say something was stolen on the bus or who routinely “lose” things on the bus
- A student who is typically happy and friendly suddenly acting upset, depressed, anxious, and/or isolated
- Ripped or soiled clothing
- Gum, food, saliva, or other objects on a student's body or clothing
- A student having a panic attack or showing signs of anxiety
- A student telling you or hinting that a friend was bullied



## Responding to Bullying

There are simple steps you can take to try to prevent and/or stop bullying.

Do:

- Get to know all students and foster a positive environment
- Instill trust by making students feel like you care about their well-being and will take reports of bullying seriously
- Encourage students to report incidents of bullying to you or another adult

A verbal warning may be all that's needed to solve the immediate issue, but you may need to stop the bus in a safe location to address a serious bullying problem.

- Enforce school policies on bullying
- Intervene immediately when you see bullying on the bus, using firm but respectful behavior
- Separate students who are involved in bullying
- Make sure any victim of bullying is safe and suffers no physical harm

- Review video from your bus when you suspect there was bullying that you could not see
- Report all incidents of bullying
- Talk to other school staff about incidents of bullying—an incident of bullying on the bus may continue in the school

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Don't ignore bullying or reports of bullying
- Don't think the students will "work it out" without any intervention from an adult
- Don't think that a quick apology has solved the problem
- Don't think a video-camera system on your bus will prevent all bullying
- Don't immediately try to sort out the facts or force an apology—your job is to stop the bullying and ensure safety
- Don't force other kids to say publicly what they saw
- Don't question the students involved in front of other students



- Don't talk to the students involved together, only separately
- Don't make the students involved apologize or patch up relations on the spot

Get immediate help from a supervisor, police, or medical professional if:

- A weapon is involved
- There are threats of serious physical injury or violence
- There is serious bodily harm or sexual abuse
- Anyone is accused of an illegal act, such as robbery or extortion—using force to get money, property, or services

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## Chapter 7: Student Management Quiz

**Directions:** Read each statement carefully and mark the response that best answers the question.

- 1. Rules set expectations for acceptable behavior and safety on the bus. In general, rules should be:**
  - A. short, simple, realistic, and enforceable.
  - B. posted on the bus.
  - C. stated in a positive manner.
  - D. all of the above.
- 2. Which of the following is a reasonable expectation?**
  - A. To expect students to sit still at all times
  - B. To expect complete silence from students
  - C. To expect students to keep their belongings out of the aisle
  - D. To expect students to face forward at all times
- 3. When you are enforcing the rules, it's important that you be:**
  - A. consistent.
  - B. well liked by the students.
  - C. loud and angry.
  - D. all of the above.
- 4. How can you positively reinforce desirable behavior?**
  - A. Respond with positive comments
  - B. Ignore positive behaviors
  - C. By enforcing consequences
  - D. Issue a written warning
- 5. If administered properly, \_\_\_\_\_ should cause a bad behavior to stop or lessen.**
  - A. privileges
  - B. discipline
  - C. recognition
  - D. both A and B

**6. When you are disciplining a student, you should NEVER:**

- A. grab, slap, hit, or shake the student.
- B. use profanity.
- C. lose your temper.
- D. all of the above.

**7. What should you do if you need to address a serious behavioral problem while you are driving?**

- A. Use your mirrors to establish eye contact with the disruptive student or students
- B. Stop the bus in a safe location prior to dealing with the problem
- C. Appoint a responsible student to deal with the issue so you can continue to concentrate on your driving
- D. Yell sarcastic comments to the disruptive student or students

**8. Bullying and harassment are serious issues that:**

- A. cannot be tolerated or ignored.
- B. can quickly escalate into serious problems.
- C. can affect safety on the bus.
- D. all of the above.

**9. Which of the following might be a sign of bullying?**

- A. Samantha, who is usually quite bubbly, seems nervous and afraid
- B. Jose is crying and complaining of a paper cut on his finger
- C. Ty appears to be happy but has a hole in the knee of his jeans
- D. All of the above

**10. When it comes to bullying, if \_\_\_\_\_, you should get immediate help from a supervisor or the police.**

- A. there are threats of serious physical injury or violence
- B. your video-camera is not functioning properly
- C. a child tells you their friend is being bullied
- D. both A and B