

BUS DRIVERS AND TRANSPORTATION SUPERVISORS



Bus Drivers/Transportation Supervisors

Many students with autism start and end their day on the bus, and their transportation circumstances can vary considerably. Routing issues are important, but it may also be necessary to schedule accommodations for the child's sensory, behavioral, medical or organizational needs. A student might be placed on a smaller bus and/or accompanied by an aide, or may require supports or considerations in the midst of a full bus and busy situation. Understanding autism, as well as the particular characteristics of an individual child, is important for the transportation department planning for the child, as well as the drivers and aides who may transport him.

Things to think about:

- Awareness of the characteristics of autism as well as the specifics of a student can be helpful in avoiding or managing upsetting situations
- Be aware of the impaired judgment, sensory issues or significant fears that might provoke unexpected behaviors in a student with autism—a lack of respect for traffic considerations may result in a tendency to dart into the street, or the presence of a dog on the sidewalk might mean the child refuses to get off of the bus—know what to do to avoid or manage particular needs
- Be mindful of communication challenges; solicit guidelines for communication from his family or special education staff, knowing that you may need to wait for a response to a question or use an alternative communication device or strategy such as pictures
- Be aware that a need for adherence to routine may result in anxiety (and behavior) surrounding changes to the bus route, substitute drivers, seat changes, etc—reduce anxiety by communicating with the student in advance, using visuals wherever possible
- For a child with medical issues such as seizures, it is important to develop a protocol for safety and management with the family and school nurse
- Be aware of the social vulnerability of this population of students and the propensity for them to be victims of bullying behaviors
- Students with autism are not socially savvy; therefore, if a student is being bullied or tortured quietly, he is likely to react or respond—and that is the overt behavior of which you are likely to become aware; consider the communication difficulties of a student with autism and make every attempt to fully understand the elements of a situation before reaching judgment regarding fault or behavior
- Transitions are difficult for some students – this may result in trouble getting on or off the bus
- Many students with autism like predictability and have good long term memory—a student might be able to assist a new or substitute driver with the route



Strategies

- Adjust the route—shorten, or use preferential pickup/drop off situations (e.g. to the calmer side of the school, earlier or later than the rush of students, etc)
- Consider if the support of an aide is needed
- Be calm, positive and an appropriate behavior model for the student with autism as well as other students—greetings, etc.
- Reinforce the behaviors you wish to see with behavior-specific praise (e.g. “I love the way you went straight to your seat and buckled up!”)
- Use [About Me](#) to get to know relevant facts about each particular student’s likes, fears, needs, etc. Ask specific questions regarding safety and impulsivity.
- Visual schedules can be helpful in establishing and perpetuating routines, ensuring compliance (such as buckling a seat belt) and managing behavior. Following is a generic example, but a custom schedule can easily be made using a digital camera to take a picture of each step or action.
 1. Wait at the bus stop
 2. Get on the bus
 3. Sit down
 4. Buckle my seat belt
 5. Ride quietly to school
 6. Get off the bus
- Provide written rules or pictures of expectations of bus behavior for the child—as well as the school staff and parents so that they may provide additional support (e.g., if there is no eating on the bus, mom needs to know not to send the child out the door with a bagel)
- Work with the school team to provide social narratives or rule cards that might help a student understand a rule or expectation (e.g. why sitting too close is annoying to another rider, why a bus may be late, or what traffic is). Especially for a student who might have trouble understanding subtle social cues, provide ‘Unwritten rules for the bus’ and input on what the social conventions are on a particular route (e.g. seniors sit in the back)
- Give positive directions, minimize the use of ‘don’t’ and ‘stop’ e.g. ‘Please sit in your seat’ can more effective than ‘Don’t stand up’. This provides the student with the direction of exactly what you would like him to do.
- Allow ear plugs or allow use of music or headphones
- Allow hands on sensory items (e.g. squeeze toys)
- Consider peer buddies to support and shield a vulnerable student. It may be helpful to have support from school staff in finding a way to pair students.

