Raising the Bar

New York State's School Bus Drivers, Monitors and Attendants

Responsible

Prepared &

Proud

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Setting a Common Standard

A project of the New York State Education Department, PTSI and *Safety Rules!*

NOTE: This publication is intended to provide a realistic picture of school transportation in New York State. Any reference to unique religious or cultural practices is solely for instructional information to heighten awareness and sensitivity to different student populations. This information is disseminated to widely divergent populations with varying sensitivities. It is our intention that nothing in the content of this publication be perceived as an affront to any person or group of persons.

2013-2014 School Bus Driver Instructor Professional Development Seminar Manual

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REFRESHER III: TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Refresher III Topics

Introduction

Serving children with disabilities is a big part of the modern educational system. Disabled children represent 10-20% of the student population in most school districts today. Every New York State school bus driver, monitor or attendant needs to know how to provide safe, caring transportation for children with special needs.

III.1 Most School Buses Transport Children with Special Needs

You will be working with children with disabilities. Most children with disabilities ride regular school buses. Most New York State school bus drivers, monitors and attendants transport children with special needs. Successful transportation of children with special needs requires:

- Safe, current, working equipment and vehicles
- Appropriate staffing on vehicle for student needs
- Consistent staffing on the bus
- Staff who understand student-specific needs
- Staff who have received student-specific training
- Written student-specific emergency plans
- Respectful, friendly bus environment

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Our country has come a long way in how we treat people with disabilities. Throughout history, discrimination against the disabled has been as deeply rooted and destructive as racial prejudice. Just a generation ago, children who were considered "handicapped" seldom had a chance to go to school. Most adults with disabilities spent their entire lives completely segregated from society – locked up in dreary institutions or hidden away in a back room of their family's home.

The watershed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1975, was the culmination of countless local battles for equal rights for disabled children. The law of the land now required school districts to provide a "free and appropriate public education" for all children, disabled or not.

Key role of the school bus in educating children with special needs. One of the key barriers to meeting the new mandate to provide an education to children with disabilities was getting them to and from school. Transporting children with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities created many new challenges for school districts. From the early years of IDEA, educating children with special needs has depended in a deep way on the skills, resourcefulness, and caring of school bus drivers, monitors and attendants.

Working with parents. Parents of children with disabilities face many challenges. Their challenges come both from living with and loving their children day to day and from trying to work with service providers whose rules and restrictions sometimes can make them feel frustrated and powerless. Our goal in student transportation is not be to not be one of those service providers who make their life more difficult. Let parents know that you want to do what is best for their children. Keep lines of communication open. Parents know their children better than anyone and may be able to help you understand their child's needs and behaviors.

III.2 Special Education Terms and Concepts

As a school bus driver, monitor or attendant, you need to understand the meaning of key terms used in special education.

Committee on Special Education (CSE). By law, each New York State school district has a "CSE." A CSE is made up of special education teachers and staff, administrators, and parents. Its purpose is to identify and assess children who may need special education services, including specialized transportation arrangements such as a lift-equipped bus, bus attendant, house stop, etc. Transportation representatives are sometimes asked to participate in CSE meetings.

Individualized Education Program (IEP). An "IEP" must be created for each student who the CSE identifies with a need for special education or related services, which can include special transportation arrangements. IEPs define specific educational, social, and behavioral goals for each child. The IEP provides information about the child that can assist the transportation staff in providing safe and effective transportation.

Transportation personnel should be informed of:

- the reasons a student requires special transportation;
- health needs that might necessitate ongoing or emergency intervention;
- student behavioral issues or fears that might raise health or safety concerns; and
- specialized training required for bus drivers, monitors or attendants.

While New York State Law requires the notification and training listed above, at times this information and specific training needs are not shared with transportation. If you find out that a child you are transporting has special medical equipment/devices such as: oxygen tanks, lap trays, tracheotomy tubes, medical magnets, epi pens, etc. or has behavioral issues you have not been trained to address, notify your office immediately so that you can be prepared to safely transport that child and respond to emergency situations that might arise because of a medical or behavioral need.

Schools must provide any services specified on a child's IEP. For instance, if the IEP

indicates a child needs a bus attendant or monitor, the district cannot legally ignore the requirement, even for one day. If the IEP specifies that the attendant must be CPR-certified, the district must comply.

Confidentiality. Unnecessarily revealing personal information about students or their families is a violation of state and federal law. The only exception to this rule is if the information is necessary in an emergency to protect a child.

If you have questions about the students you transport or feel you need more information to ensure their safety during the bus ride, ask your supervisor or SBDI for help. It is fully appropriate and professional for school bus drivers, monitors and attendants to ask questions about a child's health, behavior, or physical needs if the information could help ensure that child's safety on the bus.

Any student information carried on your bus – route information such as names, ages, addresses, and phone numbers – should be securely maintained. It should be accessible only to those who are directly responsible for protecting the student, such as a substitute driver, monitor or attendant or emergency responders.

Avoid using actual student names over the radio whenever possible. Who knows who's listening? When using the radio, try to find a way to say what you need to say without saying it.

III.3 Children with Special Needs Are Diverse

Every child is unique. A child with a disability is a child, not a disability. Every child, disabled or not, is an individual with a unique personality. All children have their own hopes and fears. When you think of a child's disability, try to understand it as a "difference" and not a deficit or a deviance which have negative connotations. Difference simply means that something about that child is different from what would be considered typical. Many children with disabilities have unique talents, personalities and perspectives that go far beyond those of children who might be considered "typical."

Within every disability category discussed below, individual children display a wide spectrum of characteristics and behaviors.

General disability categories. Although no two children within a disability category are alike, it's helpful for school bus drivers, monitors and attendants to be familiar with the typical characteristics of the disabled students they may be working with.

The New York State Education Department defines thirteen types of disabilities eligible for special education services. These specific disabilities can be grouped into three general categories:

1. Physical disabilities
2. Mental disabilities
3. Emotional disabilities

Types of physical disabilities. New York State identifies six types of physical disabilities that may qualify a child for special education services:

1) "Orthopedic impairment" refers to a physical problem affecting a child's bones, muscles, joints, or tendons. The category includes birth defects such as clubfoot or absence of a limb, as well as skeletal problems caused by disease (polio, bone tuberculosis, spina bifida, etc.), or

impairments from other causes (cerebral palsy, amputation, severe fractures, etc.).

Some children with orthopedic impairments use wheelchairs, walkers, or other types of mobility devices to get around. They may need to be transported on a lift-equipped bus.

Safely transporting children using mobility devices requires the highest degree of caution and attention to detail. A school bus emergency involving children in wheelchairs poses exceptional challenges. Children with orthopedic disabilities often receive specialized services from a physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT). Your school's PT or OT can be a valuable source of information about how to safely transport a child with orthopedic impairments.

2) "Deafness" refers to a hearing impairment so severe that the child has difficulty processing linguistic information through hearing, even with a hearing aid.

3) "Hearing impairment" indicates a less severe hearing loss, or an intermittent hearing loss, that still adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Most deaf and hearing impaired children ride the regular school bus along with their non-disabled peers and many are fully integrated into the typical educational program at school. Others attend special schools for deaf children. Many deaf children can communicate effectively both with hearing and non-hearing individuals.

4) "Visual impairment including blindness" indicates a vision problem so severe that, even with correction, a student's educational performance is adversely impacted. The category includes both partially sighted and completely blind children. Blind children often ride a regular school bus with their sighted peers. Emergency planning should take into account how to guide a blind child safely off the bus in an evacuation.

5) "Deaf-blindness" includes children who have simultaneous hearing and visual impairments, creating substantial communication barriers. Deaf-blind children's developmental and educational needs often require specialized programs beyond those offered to deaf or blind students. Careful emergency planning is essential when transporting deaf-blind children.

6) "Other health-impairment" is a large disability category, covering a wide variety of chronic and/or acute health conditions that affect a child's ability to function successfully in a school environment.

Health problems that may qualify a child as disabled include heart conditions, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, and diabetes. Children who are weakened or inattentive due to an illness require special caution during the bus ride.

Tourette syndrome, attention deficit disorder (ADD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are also included in the "other health impaired" disability category. Children with Tourette syndrome may exhibit repetitive, inappropriate behaviors such as uncontrollable cursing.

Children with ADD or ADHD seldom show physical signs of their conditions. They look like any other child but often have difficulty maintaining focus on a particular goal or task. Their impulsive behaviors can be challenging for the bus ride.

Types of mental disabilities. New York State identifies five types of mental impairments that may qualify a student for special education services:

1) "Autism" is a developmental disability affecting the ability to communicate and interact with others. The incidence of autism among children has grown exponentially over the past generation. Approximately one out of every 110 children born today have some form of autism.

The term autism covers a wide spectrum of behaviors and is often referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD. "Asperger's Syndrome" is a milder form of autism. Children with Asperger's Syndrome are usually of typical or higher intelligence and can often function effectively in the typical school environment. Children with more severe forms of autism may display characteristic repetitive movements such as rocking or waving, or "echolalia," compulsively repeated phrases or words.

Many children on the autism spectrum have a strong preference for predictable patterns and order. Sudden changes – for instance, an unavoidable detour on your bus route – can be very difficult for children with autism.

Some children with autism can communicate effectively with pictures (story boards) or keyboards.

2) "Learning disability" is a disorder involving the processing of spoken or written language. Children with learning disabilities may have difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing math. Dyslexia is one form of learning disability. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

3) "Speech or language impairment" is a communication disorder, such as stuttering or other language or voice impairment. To be considered a disability, the disorder must be severe enough to adversely affect a child's performance in school. Children with speech delays or impairment are frequent targets of teasing and bullying.

4) "Intellectual Disability" (previously identified as "Mental Retardation") indicates generally below average intellectual functioning, existing simultaneously with other developmental delays and behaviors. Children with an intellectual disability are often affectionate, and may readily develop strong emotional attachments. Adults in charge must be cautious to deter inappropriate interactions.

5) "Traumatic brain injury" is the result of a blow to the head or because of certain medical conditions such as stroke, encephalitis, aneurysm, or a brain tumor, causing impaired thinking, language, memory, or judgment. Perceptual and motor skills and psychosocial behavior can also be affected. Children who have suffered a traumatic brain injury can be highly unpredictable.

Emotional disability. Children are considered "emotionally disturbed" when they exhibit a prolonged and pronounced inability to learn that cannot be explained by a lack of intelligence, sensory disabilities, or illness.

Children who are emotionally disturbed often exhibit inappropriate behaviors or feelings under otherwise normal circumstances. They frequently have trouble establishing friendships with peers or positive interpersonal relationships with teachers.

Pervasive unhappiness or depression is often a characteristic of children with emotional disturbance. Physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems are common. Schizophrenia is a form of emotional disturbance.

Transporting children with emotional disturbance can be very challenging. Their frequent volatility and inappropriate behavior require consistent self-control and psychological savvy from the adults in charge.

Multiple disabilities. A child with "multiple disabilities" has two or more simultaneous impairments, such as intellectual disability and visual impairment, intellectual disability and orthopedic impairment, etc., resulting in such severe educational needs that they cannot be met in a special education program designed solely for one of the impairments.

Some of these students with multiple disabilities are "medically fragile". Many school districts now transport medically fragile children to and from school every day. Medically fragile children have potentially life-threatening health problems. They may need medical equipment such as oxygen during the bus ride. Their condition may be serious enough that an attendant or even a nurse must accompany them on the bus ride. In rare cases, severely ill children may have a "Do Not Resuscitate" order (DNR) in place. A DNR raises legal and emotional issues that go well beyond the scope of this course. If you are asked to transport a child with a DNR, your supervisor will provide you with the information and support needed to carry out such a sensitive mission.

III.4 Sensitivity

Isolation. The experience of children with disabilities is often one of isolation. They are isolated on "special ed" buses and special education classrooms. Their parents are often isolated from other families because their child's differences make their friends uncomfortable.

Think about a time when you were at an event where you felt out of place. Think how much you would have appreciated a friend at that moment and try to be that welcoming and understanding friend for the children you transport and their parents.

Words are important. Outmoded words keep negative stereotypes and demeaning attitudes alive. A thoughtless comment about a child can leave a lasting scar. Sensitivity towards children with disabilities begins with a self-examination of how we speak – about them and to them.

Our society has a long history of savage verbal abuse aimed at the "handicapped." Making fun of disabled people was routinely accepted long after racist and sexist "jokes" were considered strictly off-limits. Professional school bus drivers, monitors and attendants get to know their children as individuals rather than relying on rude stereotypes.

Unfortunately, many children on school buses have overheard extremely demeaning comments from transportation staff, such as "She's just a vegetable – why are we even bothering to take her to school?" Always assume children can understand what you're saying. The child who is the subject of the remark is hurt; the other children are learning negative behavior modeled by you.

When speaking about a child with a disability, try to use "people-first" language. Refer to the child first, then the disability. For instance, instead of saying "blind child," say "a child who is blind." Avoid the use of negative terminology that reinforces outmoded stereotypes about people with disabilities. For instance, instead of the phrase "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound," which implies that the individual is helplessly imprisoned, say "uses a wheelchair" or "wheelchair user." Language matters! Even the common term "handicap" implies helplessness. The ancient origin of the word "handicap" is "cap in hand," meaning "beggar."

Tips for interacting effectively with children with disabilities include:

- Listen to them. If the child has difficulty speaking, listen attentively and patiently. Don't finish the child's sentences. If the child has difficulty hearing or comprehending, speak slowly and in short sentences.
- Be aware of both your verbal and non-verbal communication. Our attitudes are often more clearly communicated with our body language and tone of voice than the words we say.
- Remember that communication can be the spoken word, sign language, gestures or behaviors, and a variety of communication tools such a storyboards, touch screens and typing machines.
- Assume children with disabilities *can* do something. Don't assume they're helpless. Ask if they need your help.
- When speaking at length with a child who uses a wheelchair, try to place yourself at their eye level.
- When speaking with a child who has a visual impairment, identify yourself before speaking.
- Treat teenagers with disabilities as teenagers, not as young children.
- Don't lean against or hang onto a child's wheelchair. The wheelchair is part of the child's personal space.
- If a child using a wheelchair can't fasten the lap or shoulder belts on his/her own, be as sensitive and non-intrusive as possible when doing it for the child. Think how it would feel if someone was doing it for you. Whenever possible, keep the back of your hand instead of your palm against the child's body as you work on the belts.

Children, too, can be horribly insensitive to each other. For instance, the time-honored tradition of referring to the special education bus as the "retard bus" still lives on today in some school systems. As a school bus driver, monitor or attendant, you are a role model. Many children will look up to you. Teach them to care for each other and befriend each other despite their differences.

PJ's Law. In 2005, a child with autism was viciously and repeatedly belittled by a bus driver and attendant. Caught on tape, the ugly incident was so disturbing to parents and educators that a new state law, known as "PJ's Law," was passed. PJ's Law requires annual sensitivity training for all transportation staff as well as specific pre-service training on understanding of and sensitivity to children with disabilities. This unit of the New York State Education Department Pre-service Course meets that pre-service requirement.

On your bus, encourage children to do as much for themselves as they can. For instance, many children who use a mobility device are fully capable of locking or unlocking the wheelchair brake, latching or unlatching lap and shoulder belts, etc.

Throughout history, people with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities have accomplished incredible feats in government, business, education, the arts, sports, and in daily life.

III.5 Emergency Concerns

Unit 5, "Emergency Preparedness," will prepare you for some of the most common emergency situations you may face as a school bus driver. However, you should be aware of specialized emergency concerns when transporting students with special needs.

Evacuation plan. When driving a run that includes children with limited mobility or other physical or mental conditions that could impede their rapid evacuation, you need a crystal-clear plan of exactly how you will get them out of the bus if an emergency occurs. Which children will you take out first? In what order? From which exit? If you have a bus attendant, exactly what will he or she be doing? Who will be outside to help students off the bus, and who will stay inside to get them to the exit?

It's unrealistic and dangerous to assume that you will know what to do in an emergency situation without outlining a plan. Panic and confusion can cost valuable time. In some situations, such as a fire, you may have only two minutes to get all children out of your bus. During an actual emergency there's no time to figure out how to quickly remove children from your bus. You need to decide ahead of time.

Create a specific plan for two types of emergencies: 1) rear door evacuation (e.g., if the engine catches on fire); and 2) passenger door evacuation (e.g., if there's a fire at the back of your bus).

Ask your SBDI or supervisor to help you with your plan. Take enough time to really think it through. Use a blackboard to sketch out where children are seated and where the emergency exits are located on your bus. Carefully consider every child's disability and how it impacts your emergency plans.

You need to practice the plan. Practice might reveal a potential bottleneck you didn't notice when the plan was only on the blackboard. Practice also prepares your students.

Any practice evacuation involving children with special mental, physical, or emotional needs must be conducted with the full approval and active support of the school and your supervisor. Children's teachers and classroom aides may be able to observe and assist as necessary. Preventing an injury to a vulnerable student during the drill must be a priority.

Location of emergency services along the route. When transporting children with special needs, learn the location of all emergency services along your daily route. This is especially important with medically fragile children. This includes hospitals, clinics, ambulance terminals, fire departments, and police stations. In a serious emergency, it may be faster to drive to a facility than having emergency personnel come to the bus. Discuss this issue with your supervisor.

REFRESHER IV: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Refresher IV Topics

Introduction

Refresher IV will prepare you to handle emergencies you may encounter as you drive a school bus. From the first day you transport students, you must be mentally prepared for a sudden emergency.

IV.1 What to Do If You've Had an Accident

Report it at once. School buses are very safe, but the road is a dangerous place. Traffic accidents are a fact of life. School buses survive most crashes remarkably well. As long as children are properly seated, serious injuries to children are rare. But even after a minor incident, calming children and assessing possible injuries can be a challenge. No matter how minor, it is extremely important to immediately report an accident, crash, or incident from the scene by radio. What at first seems like a "minor" incident may turn out to be not so minor. Student injuries are not always apparent at first. Immediate reporting of all incidents from the scene protects both you and your students. If the radio isn't working or you're out of range, use a cell phone to contact base or 911. If you can't get through, ask a bystander or Good Samaritan to call for help.

Stay calm. Keeping students calm until help arrives is very important. Children pick up quickly on adult emotions and can panic if they think someone is hurt. Reassure them that "everything is OK" – even if you aren't entirely sure that's the case.

Accounting for all students after an accident is extremely important. Even in a minor incident, and even if they seem uninjured, children should not be permitted to leave an accident scene without school district authorization. If parents make it to the scene before school officials arrive, ask them to stay at the scene to comfort their children until district and medical personnel arrive.

Protect the scene. It is crucial to protect the accident scene as quickly as possible. A disabled bus stopped in or next to the road could easily be struck again by another vehicle. A minor fender bender could quickly turn into a serious incident. Many motorists are killed every year when their disabled vehicle is struck by another.

Activate your 4-way hazard flashers at once. If your bus is equipped with a roof-mounted strobe light, turn it on. Arrange to have emergency triangle reflectors set up as soon as possible to alert other motorists. Do not leave students unattended on the bus to place

the reflectors, even for a few moments, except in exceptional circumstances when the urgent danger of a second crash outweighs other considerations.

After an accident, do not move your bus, unless it is positioned where a second collision is possible. If moving is necessary to prevent another vehicle from crashing into your bus, pull off the roadway to a safer area nearby, even before police arrive if you must. Notify base by radio that you're moving the bus off the roadway to prevent a second collision.

Cooperate with emergency responders. Be prepared to provide emergency responders with an accurate seating chart as they arrive on the scene. They will need to know how many students (and any other passengers, such as a bus attendant) were on board your bus. Inform emergency personnel as soon as they arrive on the scene of any students with special needs or medical conditions.

Don't get into an argument with the "other motorist" at the accident scene, and if the media comes to the scene, don't be a spokesperson for your school district or bus company. Ask the reporter to speak to your supervisor.

Be forthright and honest about what happened when interviewed by the police or your supervisor.

IV.2 Breakdowns

Report possible mechanical problems at once. When transporting students, a mechanical problem is more than just an inconvenience. A breakdown exposes students to increased risk. A disabled bus in or near the roadway could be struck by another vehicle. Students could be subjected to extreme weather conditions.

A thorough pre-trip inspection reduces the chance of a breakdown, but mechanical problems could still develop on the route. Always be on the lookout for early warning signs of a possible mechanical problem. Scan your gauges regularly for signs that a mechanical component (e.g., alternator, battery, engine, transmission) is beginning to fail.

Other clues that something is not right include unusual noises (e.g., knocking, banging, grinding, whining, screeching), unusual smells (e.g., fuel, hot radiator, burning or electrical), and a change in how the vehicle handles (e.g., pulling to one side, "loose" steering, soft brakes, bouncing, engine sluggish or skipping). Stay alert and use your senses – sound, sight, smell, and touch – to detect a developing problem early.

Do not continue on your route or trip if you suspect a mechanical problem. Do not wait until you get back to base to report the problem. Notify base by radio at once. If you can't reach base by radio, pull over in a safe location and use a cell phone.

Stop in a safe location. As after an accident, a bus with a mechanical problem stopped in the roadway could easily be struck by another vehicle. Pull off the road to a safe location such as a parking lot as soon as a problem is suspected. If you must stop along the road, look for a wide shoulder with good visibility to other motorists. Be careful when pulling off the road – be alert for soft shoulders and ditches. Turn on your 4-way hazard flashers and set out reflectors as soon as possible.

If your bus is stuck. Even skilled bus drivers occasionally get stuck in snow, ice, or other slippery conditions. Gently moving your bus

forward and back may provide enough traction to get going again. However, repeatedly rocking the bus back and forth, or spinning the drive tires in an effort to get going, can be dangerous, especially with children on board. Tires can catch fire if spun hard, or your bus could break loose unexpectedly and slide sideways into a ditch or other hazard.

Notify base by radio as soon as you realize you're stuck. Most bus drivers have had it happen; it's nothing to be embarrassed about.

Towing a bus can be dangerous, even for short distances. The tow line could snap or the bus could tip. Escort students to a safe spot well away from the action. Keep them together. Have younger students buddy up.

Transferring students to a replacement bus. Transferring students from your disabled bus to a replacement bus requires careful attention by bus drivers, monitors and attendants. Activate your red student flashers and 4-way hazard flashers before beginning the transfer. Younger students should hold hands and buddy up.

Never leave students unattended on your bus, even for a few moments, or let them enter the replacement bus unless you or the other driver, monitor or attendant is on board. Do a student count to make sure everyone is on the replacement bus before you pull away.

IV.3 Radio Use in an Emergency

Getting help quickly is the priority. School buses are routinely exposed to a wide variety of dangerous situations on the road: challenging weather and traffic conditions, mechanical problems, and student behavior problems are only the most common. School bus emergencies happen every day. Being ready for an emergency is one of your most important responsibilities as a school bus driver, monitor or attendant.

Every school bus emergency is different, of course, but there is a common theme in how you should respond: Get help to the scene as quickly as possible. Even in a relatively minor incident (e.g., fender-bender with no apparent injuries, breakdown with the bus pulled safely off the road), calming and controlling dozens of children on your bus will not be easy.

In a more severe incident, such as a serious crash or bus fire, getting help to the scene quickly could be the difference between life and death.

During any emergency, contact base by radio or 911 by cell phone as soon as possible. If at all possible, make the initial call before getting out of your seat. Getting help headed your way is the priority.

Conveying critical information. Some school districts and bus companies use a system of radio codes to designate various emergencies. "10-50" is a common radio code for accident. If your employer uses radio codes, find out what they are. Memorize them or tape a list of codes to your clipboard.

Many school districts have stopped using radio codes because they are so easily forgotten or confused in the stress of a real emergency. Plain speaking is usually the most effective way to communicate during an actual emergency.

Collect your thoughts *before* speaking over the radio. Convey the most important information clearly. Give your bus number,

where you're located, and a brief description of what happened.

Using the word "emergency" early in your transmission alerts your dispatcher, other bus drivers, and anyone else listening in that this is not a routine radio call.

Avoid giving too much information – student names should be mentioned over the radio only in exceptional circumstances when base needs to know the identity of a particular student to help direct the appropriate response.

Other bus drivers in the fleet should stay off the air when there's an emergency.

Cell phone use in an emergency. Once your bus is stopped, a cell phone can be extremely helpful in an emergency. Using a cell phone instead of the two-way radio lets you give more secure and detailed communication to base about what has happened. The rest of the community won't hear everything you say.

IV.4 School Bus Fires and Wires

School bus fires do happen. School bus fires occur more frequently than is commonly thought. Bus fires can be caused by a variety of mechanical or electrical system problems, by collisions, or even by student vandals.

School buses can burn quickly in some situations. Once seat cushions have ignited, it takes less than two minutes for heat and fumes to make the passenger compartment unsurvivable.

Because bus fires can spread fast and are potentially lethal, any sign of a possible fire (e.g., smoke, burning or hot electrical smell, warnings from other motorists) should be taken seriously. Students should be evacuated at once if there's any indication of a possible fire.

Typical fire scenarios. The two most common bus fire scenarios are front engine fires and fires at the rear of your bus due to a crash. You should be prepared to respond to both scenarios. Your student passengers should be trained to respond to them as well.

You may first become aware of a front engine fire when smoke or flames enter the passenger compartment under the dash near your seat. Electrical power and/or vehicle controls may be lost. After calling base and stopping in a safe area off the road, shut the bus off and immediately begin a rear-door evacuation.

Even after you are certain all students are safely off the bus, don't open the hood to try to extinguish an engine fire. Opening the hood lets oxygen flood in and may cause the fire to flare up. You could be seriously burned.

If another vehicle crashes into the rear of your bus while you're stopped, it could catch fire. It could catch fire even though there's little or no damage to your bus. Spilled gasoline from the other vehicle can increase the danger. Begin a front door evacuation.

If the other vehicle is on fire, it may be quicker and safer to move your bus a safe distance away from the burning vehicle before evacuating the students.

Fire extinguishers. Fire extinguishers are too small to put out a serious bus fire. As a bus driver, monitor or attendant, your priority is always to get the students to safety. Let fire crews extinguish the fire when they come on the scene.

In incidents where you are certain all students are safely away from danger, you may choose to use a fire extinguisher to try to put out a

small fire on your bus. Learn how to use a fire extinguisher correctly. Stand several feet back from the fire and pull the extinguisher pin. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire and squeeze the handle. Make gentle sweeping motions as you aim the spray at the base of the fire, not the flames. Continue until the fire is completely out.

Wire on bus. School buses can also come in contact with electrical lines and you need to know what to do if an electrical wire is touching your bus. Assume that the line is charged and dangerous. Even what appears to be "only a phone line" may be crossing a high voltage line a short distance away. Stay inside and keep all passengers inside. Use a cell phone to contact 911.

Never try to remove a wire on your own. You could be killed. This is a job for a utility crew or the fire department.

Evacuate your students only as a last resort – if your bus is on fire, or in some other severe and imminent danger. If you must evacuate, all passengers must jump from the bus so they are never touching both the bus and the ground at the same time.

Don't let Good Samaritans come close to the bus to ask if they can help. They could be electrocuted. If it's raining or the ground is wet, even the area around the bus could be charged and dangerous.

IV.5 Evacuations

Make the "evacuation decision."
Evacuation is not always the best response to a school bus emergency.

Evacuating children is dangerous in itself. Children could be injured as they exit the bus, or could wander off during an evacuation and be struck by another motorist or hurt in some other way. Evacuation should never be undertaken lightly.

There is no absolute rule about when to evacuate students and when to keep them on the bus. Factors to be taken into account include the nature of the emergency (e.g., possibility of fire or second collision), the nature of the students (e.g., age, numbers, special needs), and the safety of the area they would be evacuated into (e.g., availability of a safe area off the roadway, weather conditions, presence of other hazards near the bus).

You are in charge of the emergency scene until law enforcement, emergency responders, or your supervisor arrives. After deciding what's safest, give clear and decisive instructions to your students to either stay on board or begin an evacuation.

Determine the "best exit." If you decide to evacuate, it is your responsibility to select and direct students to the best exit or exits for the situation. You must remain calmly and decisively in control of the students and the situation. Do everything you can to keep your students calm. If they panic, they could easily be hurt.

There are four main factors to consider in deciding which exit(s) to use in an evacuation:

1. Distance of the exit from the immediate danger on board your bus (where is the fire or other danger located?)

2. Whether the path to the exit is clear

3. Whether the exit will still open (emergency doors can jam in a collision)

4. Potential hazards outside the bus (traffic, spilled fuel, broken glass or other debris, downed wire, elevation of the bus over a ditch or drop-off)

Consider directing students to more than one exit to get them out quicker in a severe emergency, but make sure each exit you choose is safe. Don't forget the passenger door. In many situations it might be the best exit for getting students out quickly and safely.

Safest way to go out emergency exits. You must know how to open and use all emergency exits. Students (and adults) can be hurt if they don't know how to go out exits correctly. Emergency exits are a long way from the ground. Rear door exits are usually nearly four feet off the ground. Students must be taught to "sit and slide" out emergency doors. Jumping out exit doors is very dangerous.

If a side emergency window must be used in an evacuation, students (and adults) should exit "feet first, face down." To reduce the chance of an injury, pad the window sill with a jacket or fire blanket.

No matter which exit is utilized, select reliable, older students as "spotters" to stand outside the bus to assist students. This reduces the chance of an injury.

Accounting for students during an evacuation. Before students begin to evacuate, tell them exactly where to gather after they get off the bus. This is very important. Without clear guidance, students could wander off and be hurt, or worse.

Younger students should hold hands and "buddy up" as they exit the bus. Ask two reliable older students to go directly to the designated safe area and to gather younger students as they move away from the bus. Regardless of their age, demand that all students stay together in one safe area.

Immediately after the evacuation, make a student count. Compile an accurate student list. Compare it with your route sheet or trip roster to make sure all students are accounted for.

Contact base again by cell phone as soon as all students are off the bus. Update them about the situation so they can update emergency responders heading to the scene.

IV.6 Bus Safety Drills

Preparing your students. This unit has described how *you* should respond in emergencies. If you were delivering packages, that would be enough, but your student riders need to know how to respond in an emergency too – whether it is knowing how to follow your directions or knowing what to do if you are incapacitated. A daily emphasis on safety and regular safety tips from the Student Management and Bus Stop Safety Units content need to be backed up with well-planned, effective Bus Safety Drills. In many districts, school bus drivers, monitors and attendants have the opportunity to provide the bus safety drills to their student passengers.

Bus Safety Drill requirements. State Education Department regulations establish the timing and content of bus safety drills. Drills must be given during the first 7 days of school in the fall, between November 1st and December 31st, and between March 1st and April 30th. They must be held at a safe location on school grounds and can be taught by transportation or teaching personnel.

The drill content must include:

- Practice and instruction in the location, use and operation of the emergency door, fire extinguishers, first-aid equipment and

windows as a means of escape in case of fire or accident.

- Instruction in safe boarding and exiting procedures with specific emphasis on when and how to approach, board, disembark, and move away from the bus after disembarking including specific instructions for pupils who have to cross the road.
- An emphasis on handling specific hazards encountered by children during snow, ice, rain, and other inclement weather.
- Instruction in the importance of orderly conduct by all school bus passengers with specific emphasis given to student discipline rules and regulations promulgated by each board of education.
- Instruction on the use of seat safety belts including; proper fastening and release of seat safety belts, acceptable placement of seat safety belts on pupils, times at which the seat safety belts should be fastened and released, and acceptable placement of the seat safety belts when not in use.

The State Education Department has provided separate guidelines for each of the three bus drills as well as for summer school bus drills and activity trip bus drills. Ask your supervisor for a copy of the drill outlines. Each time you conduct a drill, you must have a witness who signs off on the drill so that accurate records can be kept.

Well-prepared student riders who have actually exited through emergency exits are going to get out quickly and safely. Students who have set the parking brake and used the radio are the key to successful response to an emergency when the driver is incapacitated.

Conducting the Drill. Drills are usually scheduled in advance through the transportation office. They must take place on school grounds. There are many ways to go over safety rules with children – find an approach that suits your personality.

Regardless of your communication style, strong student control is imperative during drills. Set the right tone by introducing the drill with a touch of formality. Stand and face your students before starting the drill. Briefly remind them of the seriousness of the exercise they are about to participate in. Point out that bus drills are required by state law and that their purpose is to make sure every child knows what to do in an emergency. Let them know that you expect every child to pay attention throughout the drill. Students learn little if they are allowed to horse around during the drill.

Student safety must be paramount during the drill. Horseplay can result in an injury. Make sure your bus is properly secured before starting the drill. Shut the bus off and take the key with you before getting out of your seat.

Do not let students push and shove during the practice evacuation. Most importantly, never allow students to *jump* out the emergency door. Emphasize this rule before starting the evacuation. Jumping from an emergency door can result in a sprained or broken ankle. It's a long way down. "Sitting and sliding" from the exit is much safer.

Children learn best when they are actively involved. Instead of just lecturing about safety rules, ask "why" questions:

"*Why* don't we allow eating on the bus?"

"*Why* do you need to know where every exit is located?"

"*Why* is it important to stay seated when the bus is moving?"

Maintain student control, but keep the drill as hands-on as possible. Instead of just talking about emergency exits, have students point

them all out. Let older students demonstrate how to open each exit. Don't forget to cover the passenger door – it might be the best way out in a real emergency. Opening passenger doors can be tricky if you don't know how. If your bus has a power door, make sure children know where the emergency override control is located.

IV.7 Violence in Society

Sources of violence. Unit 2 discussed what to do if a fight starts among students or if a student brings a weapon on the bus, but unfortunately violence can also come from outside the seemingly safe confines of our schools and vehicles. School tragedies have become a staple of the news with names like Chowchilla, Columbine, Newtown, Oklahoma City, and Dale County where violence has come to schools and school buses. Some of the perpetrators have been bullied children, some have a hatred of those of different cultures, religion or politics, some have had mental health issues, some seek a ransom and some are seeking revenge in personal or gang conflicts.

When the crisis is on school property, you might be called in at any time to transport students to pre-planned safe location.

What can you do? There are some basic rules that driver, monitor or attendants can follow to keep their bus safe.

- Ask your trainer if there is a way to hold or "key" your mike open during an incident or if there are radio codes in place to communicate the situation.
- Never, ever let an unauthorized person on your bus – being lenient about parents or others stepping into the stepwell or on the bus will leave you unprepared for someone planning harm. Don't open the door if you don't know those in the area.
- Whenever a bus has been unattended for any period of time, a complete pre-trip must be performed for vandalism or dangerous items placed on the bus.
- If you can drive away from the danger, drive to a safe and public place. Always notify base if you are leaving the bus or doing anything out of your normal routine.
- If a perpetrator is on the bus and makes demands, comply with demands. Try and put them at ease as much as possible. Try and persuade them to release some children, but don't release students to a more dangerous situation.
- Never act without evaluating your potential effectiveness and your ability to continue to protect your passengers. Ask yourself, "Can I make the situation better?" before acting.