Schoolbus Driver Safety – Students with Disabilities Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Think about it: some students might have a hard time getting on and off the bus or need help with wheelchairs or other equipment. Others might have medical conditions that the driver needs to be aware of, just in case something happens. And some students might communicate differently, so it's important for the driver to be patient and understand their needs. If things aren't handled right, it can be scary or uncomfortable for the student, and it's not fair to them. We want all kids to feel safe and included, and that starts with a good bus ride. Plus, there are rules and laws in place to protect these students, and we need to follow them. It's about doing what's right and making sure every student has the same chance to get to school and learn.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

So, when we think about the ride for students with disabilities, the very beginning and end of the journey – getting on and off the bus – can sometimes present unique challenges that we need to be extra careful about.

- Students with mobility issues might face difficulties with steps, lifts, or securement devices. Improper use or lack of assistance can lead to falls and injuries.
- Some students have specific medical conditions (like seizures, allergies, or respiratory issues) that could arise during the bus ride. Drivers need to be aware and prepared to respond appropriately, and a delay in response could be critical.
- If a student has difficulty communicating, they might not be able to easily express if they are in pain, feeling unwell, or if something is wrong with their equipment. This can delay necessary help.
- Certain disabilities can sometimes be accompanied by behaviors that, if not understood and managed correctly, could escalate and create an unsafe environment for the student and others on the bus, potentially distracting the driver.
- Standard evacuation procedures might not be suitable for all students with disabilities. Drivers need to be trained on specific techniques for safely evacuating students who use wheelchairs, walkers, or have other mobility limitations. A poorly executed emergency evacuation could put these students at

greater risk.
- Wheelchair lifts, securement straps, or other specialized equipment could malfunction, potentially causing injury to the student if not handled correctly. Regular maintenance and driver training are crucial to mitigate this risk.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Building Rapport and Understanding Individual Needs

Getting to know students with disabilities is key. It’s about figuring out what makes them comfortable, how they like to communicate, and just being friendly and patient. You’ll start to notice little things, like how they get on the bus or where they like to sit. Paying attention to these routines can help make their ride smoother and safer, and it builds trust, too. A little kindness can go a long way in making the bus a good experience for everyone.

Specific Techniques for Common Needs

Mobility Devices

- **Wheelchairs and Walkers:** Always use the lift or ramp according to proper procedures. Ensure the device is securely positioned and locked before moving the bus. Double-check securement straps. Communicate clearly with the student during the process.
- **Canes and Crutches:** Provide assistance as needed during boarding and exiting. Ensure these aids are stored safely so they don’t become tripping hazards.

Sensory Sensitivities

It’s important to remember that some students might be extra sensitive to things like loud noises, bright lights, or changes in temperature. What might seem normal to us could be overwhelming or uncomfortable for them. Working with the school and parents to figure out any specific triggers and ways to make the ride more comfortable, like keeping the noise level down or avoiding sudden bright lights, can really help.

Communication Differences

Not all students communicate in the same way. Some might have trouble speaking clearly, or they might use gestures, pictures, or communication boards. Being patient and taking the time to understand how each student communicates is crucial. Sometimes, the school specialists can give you some good tips and techniques to make sure you understand each other. Make it a point to ask parents for their insights and tips on how best to support their child during the bus ride, including their preferred ways of communicating, any potential triggers to be aware of, and effective calming strategies that work for them.

Behavioural Support

For some students, their disability might sometimes lead to behaviours that can be challenging. It’s really helpful if you know about any specific behaviour support plans the school has in place for a student and try to follow those. Using positive encouragement and trying to gently redirect them can often work. It’s also important to know when and how to safely handle a situation if a student is really upset, always following the school’s rules. And if you notice any patterns or have concerns about a student’s behavior, it’s important to let the school know.

Medical Needs

When it comes to medical needs, some students might have specific health conditions that drivers need to be aware of and prepared for. This could mean knowing about allergies and where their EpiPen is stored, or understanding how to help a student who uses an inhaler. For conditions like seizures, it’s important to know what to do if one happens and who to call for help. The school nurse is usually a great resource for learning about any specific medical needs and what your role might be in an emergency. Knowing this information and being prepared can make a huge difference if a student needs help during the bus ride.

FINAL WORD

Ensuring the safety of students with disabilities on the school comes down to understanding their individual needs, being well-trained and prepared, communicating effectively, and prioritizing a calm and supportive environment.