# Schoolbus Safety – Backing Up Safely Meeting Kit




## WHAT'S AT STAKE

Backing up is one of the most hazardous maneuvers a school bus driver performs. It's where many accidents happen, often involving pedestrians, cyclists, or other vehicles that may be difficult to see. Because of the size and blind spots of a school bus, even a low speed backing collision can cause serious injuries or damage. Our responsibility is to ensure the safety of everyone around us, and that means taking every precaution when backing up. This isn't just about avoiding property damage; it's about protecting lives.

## WHAT'S THE DANGER

Backing up presents unique challenges that increase the risk of accidents. Our field of vision is restricted, making it harder to see potential hazards. It's also more difficult to judge distances and speeds when moving in reverse. This combination of limited visibility and reduced maneuverability makes backing up particularly dangerous. School buses have significant blind spots, especially directly behind the bus and along the sides. These blind spots can easily conceal pedestrians, children on bikes, or smaller vehicles. It's crucial to understand that mirrors alone cannot eliminate these blind spots. They provide a view, but not a complete picture.

Distractions and Rushing – Setting the Stage for Accidents: Distractions, such as conversations with students or trying to hurry while backing, significantly increase the risk of accidents. When we're distracted or rushing, we're less likely to perform thorough checks and may misjudge distances or speeds, compounded by the already limited visibility while backing.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Backing up safely requires a combination of careful planning, thorough checks, and slow, deliberate movements. Here's how to minimize risks and ensure a safe backing maneuver:

**Plan Your Route Strategically**

Whenever possible, plan your route to minimize the need for backing up. This involves careful route planning and consideration of alternative approaches. Look for routes that allow you to pull forward into driveways, utilize designated bus loops, or make

U-turns where possible. This proactive approach significantly reduces the risk associated with backing maneuvers.

**Conduct Thorough Pre-Backing Checks:**

Alright, so before we even think about putting that bus in reverse, we've got to do our homework. I'm talking about a full walk-around. Not just a quick glance in the mirrors but actually getting out of the bus and walking all the way around it. Think of it like a pre-flight check for pilots – it's that important. You're looking for anything – kids playing nearby, someone walking behind the bus, a parked car that might be too close, even low-hanging branches that you might not see from the driver's seat. This walk-around is the absolute best way to avoid a backing accident, so make it a habit every single time you need to back up. No exceptions.

And while the walk-around is the most important thing, don't forget about your mirrors! Use all of them – inside, outside, those little convex ones – to get a good view of what's going on around you. Don't just give them a glance; scan them. Check them before you start backing up and keep checking them the whole time you're backing. Remember, mirrors have blind spots so that walk-around is still essential. And hey, if you've got a spotter available, use them!

**Execute the Maneuver Safely:**

- **Back Slowly and Carefully:** Never rush the backing maneuver. Proceed slowly and deliberately, allowing yourself ample time to react to any unexpected situations.
- **Continuous Observation:** Continuously check your mirrors and turn your head to check blind spots throughout the entire backing maneuver.
- **Use Your Horn:** Use the horn sparingly but effectively. A short, consistent beep can alert pedestrians and other drivers to your presence.
- **Avoid Distractions:** Refrain from any activities that could distract you while backing up, such as using your cell phone, adjusting the radio, or engaging in conversations.

**Special Considerations for High-Risk Areas:**

- **Parking Lots and School Grounds:** Exercise extreme caution in parking lots and school grounds, where children are more likely to be present and unpredictable.
- **Residential Areas:** Be extra vigilant in residential areas where children may be playing or walking near the curb.
- **Be Mindful of Cross Traffic:** If backing into or out of a driveway or parking space, be aware of cross traffic and ensure it is clear before proceeding.

## FINAL WORD

The best way to prevent backing accidents is to be proactive and take the necessary precautions every time. By planning, checking thoroughly, and backing up slowly, we can create a much safer environment for ourselves and the people around us.