

Scituate Police Department Community Services Getting to School Safely

It's the start of a new school year and a time of excitement as classes and activities are getting underway. One of the issues of concern as school starts is getting our students to and from school safely. For some students that means Bus Safety, for others it means Pedestrian Safety, and in many cases it's a bit of both. We'll look at the whole package here and try to offer some food for thought on the daily commute for our students.

First thoughts...

Getting to school safely can start on the night before a student has to get to school. Preparation can make life a lot easier in the morning and save on a lot of aggravation. How?

First, pack school bags and set out clothes the night before. Packing school bags can help us to avoid the forgotten books and assignments, permission slips and other items that need to get to school with your child. It can also make it easier to get to school or bus stops on time by getting students out of the house in a timely manner. Getting clothing together the night before also saves time in the morning, and who couldn't use a little breathing room at that time of day?

Next, get to bed at a reasonable hour and set the alarm. Leave enough time so that things that need to get done in the morning can get done without a rush. Allow time for personal hygiene, a good breakfast, taking care of lunch issues and gathering the items necessary for school. Leave the house so that you can reach school or the bus stop by walking at a reasonable pace. This allows a student to get where they have to go while having time to check for hazards along the way. Stop and check at driveways and intersections for cars before crossing. Don't run. Running can lead to careless mistakes, falls and other preventable accidents.

Man's best friend and other issues...

Pets are a wonderful part of many families, but when it comes to getting to school, they are best left at home. Pets (and dogs in particular) can be a handful, and when there are other children at a bus stop it can create problems. Sometimes dogs want to play and jump up. For some children this can cause anxiety, especially if the animal in question is large. It can also result in damage to clothing. There is also the chance that pets might break free from you and dash into the street. Children may dash right out after them trying to protect them.

Students walking to school or to the bus stop are reminded that sidewalks are the safest place to walk, if there is one available. Many times there is not. On streets where this is the case, most often it is safest to walk on the left, facing the traffic. This allows more time to react if a vehicle is operating unsafely. There may be reasons that you do not want your child walking on the left, however. Given your knowledge of your neighborhood, talk with your children about the safest way for them to walk to the bus stop or school.

Keeping to the main roads and safety in numbers...

Staying on a main road is generally safer than shortcuts through woods or sparsely populated areas. We want our children to stay in areas where they would be less vulnerable to being approached by someone they don't know. I suggest that students talk to their parents about safe places along their route to go for help in the event that there is a problem. The more safe places a student has along the route, the easier it will be to find one if that becomes necessary. It's also safer to be with someone else, so walk with a friend.

Save the Physical for Physical Education...

Walking with friends is a safe choice to make. However, sometimes students make it less safe by horsing around during the walk. Pushing, shoving and other roughhousing presents a very real risk as you walk along (particularly if you are near a road). Don't do it! The other physical aspect of this subject relates to activity at the bus stop. Often, students want to play sports or games that involve running around. Anytime children are playing near the street there is the risk of running out in front of a moving vehicle. It happened to me a few years back. Students at a bus stop were playing tag when one of them ran right across the street in front of my vehicle. Try to encourage activities that keep students from running around, such as quiz games, guessing games or even reviewing spelling or other schoolwork.

For the bus stop...

Remember the DANGER ZONE ! That's the area around every school bus about 15 feet wide. You should wait for the bus back at least this far so you're not in the Danger Zone when the bus stops. Determine what the order will be to get on the bus. This prevents the rush and pushing and shoving to get in line. Wait for the bus to COMPLETELY STOP, the doors to open, and the bus driver to indicate that it's safe to get on. If your bus stop is on the opposite side of the street from where the bus stops, wait for the bus to stop, watch for the driver's signal to cross and then check left, right and left again yourself to be sure all the cars have stopped. Cross ahead of the bus, out of the danger zone. Use the handrail as you board the bus and then find a seat quickly and quietly. If you drop something near the bus TELL THE DRIVER. Then wait for the driver's instructions on retrieving it.

On the bus...

- Sit flat the seat, facing forward with your feet down toward the floor.
- Keep your belongings with you and don't block the aisle.
- No part of your body is to be out the windows of the bus.
- Do not throw anything out the windows of the bus.
- You may talk quietly, but be considerate of the bus driver. If he/she asks you to quiet down the noise may be so loud as to be distracting.
- Don't get up or change seats during the ride.
- Please stay seated until the bus completely stops where you are to get off. Standing up before the bus stops completely can cause you to fall and be injured if the driver has to stop the bus quickly.
- Don't eat on the bus. A bump in the road or a sudden stop might cause a choking incident.
- Be respectful, both to the driver and to other students on board.

Getting off of the bus...

Many times students are anxious to get off the bus, both at school and going home. Students need to resist the temptation to get up before the bus stops. When the bus does completely stop, get off in an orderly manner without pushing or shoving. Use the handrail for descending the steps to get off of the bus. Before you do step off of the bus take a look out the door in both directions. Occasionally, a driver might try to pass by a bus on the side that the doors open. The quick look you take might save you from a serious injury.

Once off of the bus, move straight away from it out of the DANGER ZONE. If you are in a situation where you must cross in front of the bus, remember the following:

- Move out of the Danger Zone and proceed forward of the bus.
- Look for the driver to signal you to cross.
- Cross only to the edge of the bus, stop and look left, look right and look left again for vehicles.
- When it is safe to do so, finish crossing.

A couple of other safety tips for school time...

For our adult readers, I would just like to add a few notes concerning traffic safety:

- Please slow down. Speed is a major factor in many traffic crashes. The slower you travel the easier to stop and the safer the trip to school will be for our children.
- Take special note of and obey the 20 MPH School Zones. I know that 20 MPH is slow. There is good reason for it. Children's safety is at stake.
- Watch for buses that may be stopping to pick up or drop off children. Passing a bus is a moving violation that carries a \$200 fine. The law requires that you stop for ALL School Buses when they have their red flashing lights displayed. This means not only the big yellow buses, but also the vans and station wagons or other pupil transport vehicles that have school bus markings and lights. The law doesn't differentiate between the streets and schoolyards when it comes to violations of this law. If you pass a bus that is dropping students off at school with its lights flashing you will be fined, and if there was more than one School Bus passed then you have a \$200 fine for each bus.
- If you choose to drop your child off at school, do not use the bus drop-off to do this. Consult your school's handbook or ask at your school where the appropriate drop-off area is. Please remember that even after you have dropped your child off, other children may still be arriving. You still need to travel slowly and watch out for them.
- BUCKLE UP ! This is one piece of advice that fits any time of year. You love your kids and buckle them safely, right? Make sure you buckle yourself for their sake, as well. Too many times people find excuses why they don't need to buckle up. The fact is, safety belts save lives and prevent injuries. If you want to be there for your kids, do everything you can to insure that. Buckle up, for yourself and for those you love.