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STUDENT MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE

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UNIT B - STUDENT MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE

INTRODUCTION

This unit is a general guide to help you manage student passengers. General guidelines are presented, which you may need to adapt to meet the specific local policies approved by your school district's board of directors. In disciplinary cases, always follow written school district policy. The person ultimately responsible to discipline students is the school principal.

You, the driver, are often the first contact children have outside their homes every day. Your attitude toward them may set the stage for their conduct for the remainder of the day. Your words and actions can have a tremendous influence. Students are affected by what they experience while they are traveling to and from school. Undesirable conduct not only makes all passengers uncomfortable, but can jeopardize their safety. These experiences, good and bad, are an extension of the regular school day and become an important part of their education. Many of the same rules of behavior are in effect on the bus as in the classroom.

As a school bus driver, you are in the people business. Children, like adults, can be unpredictable and often have moods that reflect what is going on in their personal lives. These moods and changes in their life will be reflected in how they interact with you and with other passengers on the bus. Behavior is typically dependent on age and cognitive development, and can range from that of a toddler to a young adult. You should become familiar with the general characteristics for each age group with which you will be dealing, as well as how to apply positive techniques to manage student behavior.

In cooperation with students, parents and school officials, you are responsible for the safety of the students who ride your bus. You must be able to control them, and the bus during the ride, and during loading and unloading. The student ridership program should be a cooperative effort among students, parents, school officials, and bus drivers. A sound program makes the bus driver’s job easier and improves transportation safety.
SCHOOL BUS DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

School bus drivers have a significant responsibility to transport their students safely and efficiently to and from school. In order to do this effectively, you must create a positive atmosphere for travel, by implementing the following points:

1. Familiarize yourself with and abide by all rules, policies and procedures relating to student transportation.
2. Familiarize yourself with all assigned routes and designated school bus stops.
3. Maintain your passenger lists so they are up-to-date. These will be critical in an emergency.
4. Recognize the importance of establishing solid working relationships with students, parents, supervisors, and school administrators, especially when working to ensure proper student conduct.
5. Instruct students on proper behavior while on the bus and the consequences of improper behavior. Provide and enforce general policies regarding riding the bus, and instructions during emergency evacuation drills.
6. Conduct yourself in a professional and respectable manner.
7. Avoid becoming too closely acquainted with students; maintain a friendly but firm adult/student relationship. You should never put your hands on a student, nor should you grab, slap, hit, or shake a student.
8. Maintain order and safety on the bus at all times. Create an atmosphere where the rights of others are respected on the school bus and at the school bus stop. You can do this by:
   a. Requiring an orderly entrance and exit;
   b. Minimizing interior noise;
   c. Controlling passenger movement;
   d. Requiring silence at railroad crossings; and
   e. Prohibiting transportation of unauthorized materials.
9. Keep rules of conduct reasonable and simple for students to understand. Deal with infractions promptly, firmly and fairly.
10. Handle minor infractions with school district approved consequences. In instances of serious or recurring misconduct, follow school district policy.
11. Present a positive image in dress, hygiene, language, and manner while on duty because you represent the school system.
12. Be considerate and patient with all children, especially young students or students with special needs. These children may be entering school for the first time and may be intimidated or frightened by all the new experiences. It is important to make these children feel safe and welcome. Some students with special needs will require repetition and practice to become clear on expectations. Others may react strongly to changes in routine or environment.
13. Keep the bus clean during both regular route and extra-curricular trips. Consider making this part of students’ responsibilities by having them take any of their trash with them.
14. Remember to inspect the interior of the bus before a new group of students enters and again after they exit. This can help identify students who may be tampering with or destroying parts of the bus.
15. Consider keeping a daily log of events at the end of your routes.
16. Work with your school district to have a readily-available emergency contact list in case of an emergency, and ensure your communication system is operational.
17. Avoid negative verbal interactions, such as sarcasm, as these are not effective tools for student management.
STUDENT SEATING PLANS
Check with your school district regarding the use of seating charts in your bus. It may be a good policy to establish and use seating charts for morning and evening runs, when possible. These charts are helpful in controlling student behavior and assist you in getting to know the students’ names. This is particularly useful for elementary age students. Seating charts are especially helpful for a substitute driver and during an emergency.

Some things to consider when developing a seating plan:

1. Your route and the order in which students are loaded and unloaded at home and at school.
2. The medical conditions of the students. Keep in mind that you might not know this information. Otherwise, consider the following:
   a. Students who are medically fragile or vulnerable and who need to sit further front where there is less bounce;
   b. Students who are prone to seizures in certain light conditions;
   c. Younger students and those in child safety seats who need to sit in the first few seats;
   d. Students with respiratory conditions who need to sit away from the lift area and away from rear windows near the exhaust. Note that changes in temperature also tend to bother these students; and
   e. Students who may need to sit over wheel wells for additional lower extremity support.
3. For evacuations, consider:
   a. Which students can evacuate themselves;
   b. Which students need help;
   c. Which students could help others; and
   d. Which students are in child safety seats.
      i. They should not be in emergency exit rows; and
      ii. Never seat a student next to a window, if there is a child safety seat in the aisle position.
4. Consider behavior by thinking about students who are compatible with each other and who aren’t.
5. Consider supervision for behavior or a medical condition as indicated above.
6. Consider the age of the student. For example, some districts require grade levels to be seated together, chronologically from the front to the back of the bus. Know and follow your district procedures.
7. Consider your ability to observe the student.
STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES
Like the school bus driver, the student has responsibilities with regard to his/her behavior during the transportation process. Since poor student behavior on the school bus can be distracting to the driver and contribute to crashes, it is important to establish clear rules for the student to follow and for each student to follow them. All students and parents need to know and understand the rules, and that these rules were established for the safety of the students who ride the bus. Further, students and parents must also understand the consequences of unacceptable behavior. Often, your school administration will prepare lists of rules and regulations covering student behavior and distribute them to students and parents. The parents’ active cooperation is also helpful. Therefore, students should:

1. Know the rules, and understand and accept responsibility for their actions.
2. Be respectful of the rights of other students.
3. Be on time at bus stop locations at home and at school. They should leave home in time to reach the bus stop five (5) minutes before scheduled pickup and avoid playing when waiting for a bus, especially right next to the roadway. Present clear safety procedures for walking on the highway or crossing roadways.
4. Be aware of the dangers involved in the loading and unloading zones, including the dangers involved with loose clothing, clothing accessories and personal items that can drop under the bus.
5. Enter and leave the bus at school loading and unloading zones and at bus stops in an orderly fashion, and follow instructions. They must be careful about their own safety and the safety of others. They must move without haste, crowding or pushing.
6. Upon entering the bus, go directly to their seats, and remain seated until instructed to stand and unload.
7. Keep the aisle clear at all times. Books, lunch boxes, instruments and book bags must be placed under the seat or held on the student’s lap. DO NOT BLOCK THE AISLE!
8. Refrain from loud conversation, unnecessary noise and boisterous conduct.
9. Use appropriate language (e.g., no profanity permitted).
10. Never bring tobacco, glass containers, weapons, drugs, alcohol, or any other items that could distract the driver on the bus.
11. Keep all body parts and other objects inside the school bus. The driver will tell students when they may open and close windows.
12. Never tamper with or block emergency exits.
13. Keep hands and feet off other children and their possessions. Throwing materials, hitting, pushing, spitting, biting, tripping and rough behavior will not be tolerated.
14. Never tamper with or destroy the school bus. Students can be prosecuted for doing so.
15. Remain silent while the school bus is stopped at railroad crossings.
16. Be aware that transportation can be ultimately denied to students who act inappropriately.
17. Keep the school bus clean. Do not leave trash behind.

As a new school bus driver, you will learn the after-school route may be more demanding on the driver when compared to the morning route. After being in a classroom all day, students may have a lot of energy and a desire to release tension. You will need to develop a higher tolerance for the students’ behavior on the after-school route, without allowing flagrant abuse of the privilege to ride the school bus.
DRIVER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

As a professional bus driver, you should always have a general knowledge of each of your passengers, including their names and general behavior. Since you have contact with the students for only a short time each day, you may not initially know as much about the students as their teachers, but often you will be assigned to a route transporting the same students for several years. This may give you a chance to develop relationships with students that other district staff may not have. You must not only know how to perform your job as a driver, but you must also know something of your riders’ behavior patterns and a great deal about their reactions in order to safely pick up and deliver your passengers. Your main function is to transport the students to their destination and discharge them safely.

You must also know how to approach students in a way that will gain their respect. It is better to talk to students without shouting, showing anger or displaying irritation. Be careful to never threaten them with any action you cannot enforce. Give your instructions to the students without favoritism. If you overlook poor behavior by one student, you lose the respect of the other students. Strike a happy medium by being neither too lenient nor too harsh; both extremes are equally bad for the morale of the students on your bus. Your attitude should be friendly, cheerful and professional.

Building good bus conduct starts the first day of the school year. After arriving at your first destination and prior to unloading, stand and state the rules very clearly. Be sure to deal with the very first infraction promptly and firmly. It is much easier to prevent a bad situation than to correct one.

Work to build cooperation with your students by being friendly, courteous and helpful. Over time, high student morale will help you control the worst offenders. When offenders find that improper conduct is unacceptable to the group, they will think twice about doing things that cause them to “lose face” with the group. If your school district has a student court of inquiry, it can often help in enforcing discipline.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTING WITH STUDENTS

You can avoid many problems on the bus by recognizing good behavior and using proper techniques to reinforce that behavior. While it is often easier to use negative terms when dealing with behavior, it is much more effective to use positive comments to reinforce the good things that happen on the bus. Learn to recognize desirable behaviors and emphasize them with positive comments.

For example:
• “I saw you pick up that gum wrapper, Fred, and I appreciate it.”
• “Jane, you were at the stop on time this morning. Good for you.”
• “That’s what I like to see.”

If you learn to stress specific, positive and behaviorally-related activities on your bus, you will eventually eliminate the negative ones. Work to develop this skill. It will mean many safe and pleasant trips.

Remember the following points, when dealing with students:
• Though each student is different, do not allow special privileges for any student unless requested by the school administration.
• Observe the rights and privileges of each child only as long as he or she obeys the rules of good bus behavior. Riding is a privilege, not a right. The moment a student “gets out of line,” deal with the offender fairly, impartially and in the same manner you treat all such offenders.
UNIT B - Student Management and Discipline

• Remember that all eyes are on you while you are driving the bus. Your words and actions have tremendous influence on your passengers. Speak quietly, clearly, confidently, and firmly when talking to the students on your bus.

• Praise students generously when they accept responsibility and show a general pattern of good behavior.

If you are faced with a discipline problem, pause and relax for a few seconds. Use this time to think about what you are going to say and do next. How you handle behavioral situations, appropriately and inappropriately, will be watched closely by the students for consistency, fairness and understanding.

1. If you yell, expect yelling back, if not at you, then at someone else.
2. If you praise, expect it to be picked up by others.
3. Expect and encourage discussion and openness with students, and you will get it.
4. Keep discussions short and simple.
5. Never use profane or obscene language or raise your voice above a level necessary to be heard.

A word of warning directed to the offender may be enough for a minor infraction. Avoid getting into lengthy discussions, while the bus is moving.

CLASS: A STUDENT MANAGEMENT MEMORY AID
To help you remember important student management techniques, learn the rules represented by the letters of the word “CLASS.” By remembering one easy word, you will be able to remember five simple rules for student management.

C = Consistent.... Always be consistent with praise and discipline. Whenever a student behavior problem arises, follow through with the appropriate consequences.

L = Limits............ Set limits and make sure the students are aware of them. They should be the same for all students.

A = Attitude......... Have a positive attitude. A cheerful smile may change the behavior of a student. The attitude of the driver often becomes the attitude of the student.

S = Share............ Share with the students what is expected of them. State the rules and their consequences. If the students do not know the rules, they cannot be expected to follow them.

S = Support........ Support other drivers and exchange experiences. Other individuals may be able to assist in difficult situations. Also by sharing, common problems may be discovered and new techniques explored. Support is also available from your supervisors and from the school district, usually via the principal.
SERIOUS DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS
For problems of a more serious nature, such as a fight on the school bus, follow your school district’s procedures for discipline or refusal of rights to ride the bus and apply the following general procedure:

1. Drive out of traffic to a safe location, stop and secure the bus. This may be in a parking lot or a driveway. The fact you have taken this action makes the students realize the situation is one out of the ordinary.

2. After stopping the engine and removing the ignition key, get out of your seat, and stand and face the students. Address the offenders in a courteous manner, but in a firm voice. Don’t show anger, but all students must realize you expect an immediate, positive response.

3. Address the student(s) involved by name and state specifically what behavior you will not allow. Explain the district guidelines you expect the student to obey and you can enforce. Maintain control of yourself and avoid projecting hostility.

4. Relate your comments to a specific unacceptable behavior you want changed; don’t humiliate the child involved. This may require repeating the action you expect (using the same words) several times. Limit this communication to what is not acceptable and what must occur to remedy the situation. Suggest an action that can be performed successfully.

5. Before you specify related consequences, be sure they are supported by existing policy and the school principal, you are willing to follow through, and THEY ARE WITHIN YOUR POWER TO INITIATE.

6. Once you are sure you are on firm and acceptable ground, and you have committed yourself, THEN relay the consequences. You cannot afford to initiate hollow consequences. You must take the action you have indicated. This emphasizes the point made in Unit A regarding your relationship with your transportation director/supervisor and with the school principal.

7. Don’t forget to inform your supervisor as soon as possible after any confrontation. Make sure you document the incident, children involved and actions taken so a record is on file.

If these steps don’t work, radio the supervisor or dispatcher; don’t start the bus until you get a response. NEVER ask or send students to telephone school officials. You are responsible for all students; keep them on the bus. If you are near the school, you also might consider turning the bus around and driving back to the school. Never order any student off of the bus. Always call for assistance and be prepared if there is not a response. A call to the local police is not out of the question if the violator(s) are creating a hazardous situation which would make transporting the students unsafe.

When working through more serious discipline problems, never physically move a student. In fact, be extremely careful about physically touching a child. If a change in seating is needed, do not direct the student to sit directly behind you, but to a seat where you can more closely observe the behavior. Also keep in mind you have no legal right to put the student off the bus, except at the student’s regular bus stop or at school. Similarly, you cannot deny the student a seat on the bus the next morning.

Keep in mind there are behavioral approaches to help you with student management. However, it is most important to consistently follow established school district procedures.

If the situation escalates or requires additional attention, do not try to handle serious discipline cases by yourself. Refer all such cases to your supervisor or the school principal. Give all the facts, in detail, and be sure the entire problem is stated clearly. Usually the child who causes problems on the bus is also causing problems in the classroom. The school administrator has the whole picture of the child, while you, as a driver, know only about his or her bus behavior.
CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR
As described below, kindergarten and elementary students behave differently than middle school and secondary students. By learning some of these characteristics, you will be better informed when managing the students on the bus.

KINDERGARTEN AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS (GRADES K-5)
The kindergarten or elementary school age student tends to prefer a great deal of physical activity. Normally, these students have a problem staying in their seats. When they can't move, they often talk instead. Loud talking on the bus is a problem you will need a lot of patience to deal with, but absolute silence among students is not a healthy school bus atmosphere. Students vary in the amount of activity they need, and their behavior will vary from day to day. Students of this age have limited attention spans and short memories, and the day after an occurrence they may have forgotten all about it. For this reason, they rarely hold grudges against those who discipline them. Beginning bus drivers should not try to gain the children's favor by letting small misdeeds go unnoticed. Take prompt and continued action for all infractions of bus conduct.

These younger students tend not to pay attention to the feelings of adults, but, on the other hand, they care a lot about what the adults think of them. Some children can be actively rejected by their peers, sometimes because they are perceived as odd or have poor social skills. They also are sensitive to the opinions of other youngsters and sometimes tend to pick on children who do not fit in well with the group. If you transport students in special education and students in general education in the same bus, be alert to ensure the exceptional students are not being insulted or targeted.

Bullying can also emerge among older elementary school students. Bullying and other forms of victimization reflect individuals' lack of self-control, and bullies tend to seek victims who are insecure, anxious and isolated. Bus drivers should monitor children’s behavior and provide appropriate intervention when bullying or harassment occurs or is reported. See the section below on bullying and harassment.

Be careful not to allow individual children to hurt themselves socially by setting themselves up as the “driver’s pet.” Some students who have not yet learned to get along with others may also misbehave to attract attention.

Given the way students of this age behave, you may be able to promote a group spirit “to make our bus the best.” Many bus drivers have achieved excellent results by discussing bus rules with their students and making them “our rules.” Some drivers develop a game of having each busload try to excel in keeping the bus clean, behaving well on the bus, and staying orderly when loading and unloading. This method requires considerable skill, and new bus drivers should consult experienced drivers before attempting to start this type of competition. Keep in mind, however, that art work, festive decorations, etc., should not be displayed on the bus. These can interfere with safe operations.

MIDDLE-SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS (GRADES 6-8)
Students in the middle school are often centered on themselves and will argue to convince others or to clarify their own thinking. They begin to think more independently and critically, and also tend to become more focused on acceptance and popularity among peers. With adolescence and hormonal changes, middle school students may experience mood swings and begin to test the limits of adult authority. Social interactions may involve changing seats or loud conversations. Verbal and sometimes physical aggression can occur, sometimes in the form of bullying and harassment. Fads and conformity in communication and dress develops among peer groups. Some youth begin exploring with sexual activity, and a small percentage, especially boys, may become involved in gangs and other delinquent social activities.
SECONDARY AGE STUDENTS (GRADES 9-12)
In the junior and senior high school age groups, girls tend to be more mature than boys, but teens remain highly socially self-conscious. Relationships between romantic couples emerge, and sometimes may cause trouble on the school bus when some of the students are “going steady.” Other students often shield “making out” in the rear of the bus. Be alert to stop such actions as soon as you spot them. Ingenuity in seating arrangements can help to prevent this problem. For instance, placing the senior girls opposite seventh grade boys may help.

Students of this age are very concerned about their dignity and want to be treated like adults, although they do not always act the part. They are apt to be erratic in their behavior, and they are usually very anxious to dress and act the same as all members of their group.

You must be very careful not to make remarks about administrators and teachers. Secondary school students are chronic gossips, and any belittling remark you make may be widely circulated and magnified when retold. Students may also pass on remarks unintentionally to parents and others.

Young bus drivers must expect the older students to resent any great show of authority. Do not hesitate to ask for help from your supervisor or principal to solve problems involving these students.

SUMMARY OF AGE-LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS
The behavioral characteristics of elementary and secondary students are presented in summary form to assist you in dealing with these age groups.

Kindergarten and Elementary Students can be expected to be:

- Physically active;
- Talkative (loud);
- Forgetful (predictably unpredictable);
- Insensitive to the feelings of others (may pick on students with physical or mental disabilities);
- Sensitive to adult criticism;
- Willing to cooperate in group projects; and
- Harder to handle in the afternoon than in the morning.

Middle-School Age Students can be expected to:

- Change at different rates;
- Be vulnerable to bouts of low self esteem;
- Have new interests and abilities as well as many new feelings, thoughts, and concerns;
- Identify with their peer groups and want to belong;
- Seek limited independence and autonomy;
- Question rules and beliefs they had accepted at face value until now;
- Be easily offended and sensitive to criticism; and
- Behave erratically and inconsistently.
Secondary Students have the following characteristics:

- Girls will be more mature than boys;
- Girls will be more influenced by boys than vice versa;
- Boy/girl relationships may cause problems;
- Concerned with their dignity (image);
- Gossipy, repeat things to their parents;
- Resent authority;
- Organize in groups;
- More prone to vandalism; and
- Try to disturb the driver.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTROLLING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

The following pointers can help you prevent and/or control discipline problems you may encounter on your bus.

KEEP DISCIPLINE PRIVATE WHenever POSSIBLE

- If an individual breaks the rules of bus conduct, do not reprimand him or her in front of all the students riding the bus. Individual behavior problems that do not affect the others on the bus are best handled in a private manner.
- Avoid a showdown with a chronic troublemaker in front of the other students. Instead, report an incident to the principal or supervisor, and request their help in the matter.
- Do not threaten the entire busload for the misdeeds of a few. Focus your attention on the students creating the disorder; avoid disciplining all of the students when restoring order.
- It is a good rule never to say anything unpleasant to more than one person at a time. On the other hand, if general bus safety is being threatened by one or more students, a driver should point out their misbehavior in front of all bus passengers. A case in point is the lighting of matches by students riding the bus. Stop the incident immediately in front of the entire busload of students.

STAY PROFESSIONAL

- Young people greatly resent any sign of favoritism. Avoid being too lenient with normally well-behaved students and too harsh toward those who have been causing trouble.
- Never lose your temper. In the event of an argument or misunderstanding, the less emotion you display, the less emotion you will rouse in the student. Avoid using threats or physical force. Be consistent in your actions.
- Young people tend to test adults to see how far they can go or how much they can get away with doing. Deal with this behavior fairly and firmly, avoiding harshness or unfriendliness. If students know that reasonably good behavior is expected of them at all times on the school bus, then you may not have any real disciplinary problems.
- Start out the school year being extremely strict and gradually lessen discipline, if bus behavior remains satisfactory. Students may also calm down during the course of the year. If a difficult child shows signs of calming down, do not hold a grudge; rather, show encouragement.
- Do not exchange wise cracks and gossip with the students, as your actions should aid the educational program of the school district. Avoid shouting, arguing, and obscene or profane language.
- Avoid biases against students. Do not prejudge students because of family name, background, appearance or neighborhood. Avoid being overly suspicious, but be alert for potential discipline problems.
Act in a responsible manner. Show the importance of your job in your actions.
Always be courteous to children. Provide compliments whenever possible.
Keep alert. Do not ignore minor incidents; they can easily become major problems.

SET DISCIPLINE STANDARDS
- Do everything possible to inform students they have important responsibilities in ensuring group safety.
- Settle discipline problems quickly.
- Handle serious discipline problems only when the bus is stopped.
- Seat any troublemakers near you where you can see them and observe their behavior.
- Display smooth driving skills; poor driving habits often increase student misbehavior and frighten younger passengers.
- Be firm, fair, impartial and consistent.
- Never lose your temper.
- Treat students as you would like your child to be treated.

WORK WITH SCHOOL AUTHORITIES
Discipline on school buses is the biggest problem confronting school bus drivers, and the critical relationship to nurture is the one with school authorities.

While a school bus driver is not alone when it comes to solving discipline problems, he/she may be alone when a disturbance occurs. You are responsible for the conduct of students on your bus, but you must have the backing of the school administration to effectively discharge this responsibility. A copy of local school district rules should be posted in a conspicuous place in the bus. Always follow written school district policy. In cases of continued misconduct, report the student to the supervisor or school principal.

In many school districts, the first action taken is a reprimand. A withdrawal of bus privileges for a short period of time may occur next. If the student's behavior does not improve after returning, the privilege to ride the bus for the balance of the school year may be denied or the student may be transferred to another bus. Never put a student off of the bus for misconduct; you are not empowered to make the decision yourself. School officials may take this step after all other measures have failed to improve the situation. Keep in mind some districts will discipline a student while in school so as not to interrupt their educational experience. Some students will not come to school, if they are denied a ride on the bus.

Remember the following pointers:
- Always follow the local policy adopted by the school board.
- Supply a copy of the rules to each student and post a copy of the rules so every student is aware of your expectations.
- If any action taken by the school administration does not promote good or safe school bus behavior, ask to meet with your supervisor to discuss the matter. They can work with administration to emphasize the safety of the entire busload of students is threatened, if no action is taken against chronic offenders.
- Maintain close contact with the principal and secure their cooperation.
DON’T DEAL WITH ON-BUS PROBLEMS WHEN LOADING AND UNLOADING
In order to get students to and from school safely and on time, you need to be able to concentrate on the driving task. Loading and unloading requires all your concentration, especially considering the number of injuries and other incidents that occur during these times. Don’t take your eyes off of what is happening outside the bus. If there is a behavior problem on the bus, wait until the students have finished loading or have unloaded to a place of safety. If necessary, pull the bus over to handle the problem.

ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE
There are many differences between the students of today and the students of past decades, and past disciplinary techniques used by school bus drivers and other school officials/personnel are no longer as useful as they once were.

While there are many theories regarding behavior management for children, one respected set of guidelines and disciplinary skills known as assertive discipline, can assist school personnel, including school bus drivers with handling disciplinary problems (Canter, 1976, 1992). Assertive discipline was developed for classroom situations so teachers and other personnel would be able to understand and communicate their needs to students in order to meet the needs of the students. A more productive environment results when needs of students and teachers are met. Essentially, a key to this technique is catching students being “good,” recognizing and supporting them when they behave appropriately, and on a consistent basis letting them know you like what they are doing.

Assertive discipline can and should be applied to school bus driver/student situations. School bus drivers need to have an orderly and quiet bus; students need a safe ride to and from school. The ride is much safer for the students when your needs are met. Along with the differences in today’s students, individual bus drivers also differ. Each bus driver operates in a different manner and may allow behaviors other bus drivers will not allow. This creates a conflict for the student who expects you to react in the same manner previous bus driver. Assertive discipline can help you communicate your particular needs to the students. Although you should effectively maintain order on the school bus, you also need to avoid alienating students or infringing upon their rights. Setting limits for the students must be balanced with showing compassion and warmth.

An assertive discipline plan can be used by you to:

• Provide students with clear expectations;
• Help you handle all behavior (major and minor) problems consistently;
• Provide a common approach everyone understands;
• Prevent you from reacting emotionally or overreacting; and
• Remind you to frequently praise students and acknowledge positive behavior.

Disciplinary measures can be categorized into three types: non-assertive, hostile and assertive. These terms describe the methods used, not the person using them.
NON-ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE
There are two basic situations that can be classified as non-assertive discipline. First, if you do not clearly convey your wants and needs, then the student cannot be expected to follow them. A second non-assertive technique is to state your needs, but not back up the statements with actions. A bus driver who acts in a non-assertive manner is passive. Students will not usually cooperate with a non-assertive individual. If you feel you cannot handle student behavior, let students misbehave, back down when challenged, or feel overwhelmed, you are most likely a non-assertive driver, and you will need to change to manage student behavior.

HOSTILE DISCIPLINE
On the other hand, hostile bus drivers express their wants and needs in (negative) ways that may violate the rights of the student. While students usually obey a hostile bus driver, they may become afraid of you and act more aggressively when threatened. If you find yourself yelling constantly, threatening students (and not following up), or using physical force, you are acting in a hostile way, which is not appropriate for a school bus operator.

ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE
Assertive discipline creates a positive environment in which the needs of you and your students are met. It creates a balance between the rights of each person, and a balance between the limits you place on students and the support you show for students. Because of this, the students trust and respect you (Canter, 1976, 1993).

Assertive bus drivers are neither hostile nor passive. They clearly state their needs and back up their statements with appropriate actions. Assertive drivers have a positive outlook and believe in their abilities. They communicate effectively and plan how to respond with actions. They are persistent and quick to respond in a meaningful way, operating in a take-charge manner, but aware of the support needed by each individual child. To summarize, assertive bus drivers:

- Are the boss on the bus;
- Say what they mean and mean what they say;
- Clearly and firmly tell students exactly how they want them to behave;
- Stay calm and use a normal tone of voice;
- Have a plan of action when students do not behave; and
- Reward students when they do behave. (Canter 1987)

To become an assertive bus driver,

1. Start with an assertive attitude—No student will stop me from driving a safe bus;
2. Speak assertively—calm, firm, clear, and without anger;
3. Have an assertive discipline plan:
   a. Set clear, simple rules for behavior on the bus
   b. Have consequences when students don’t follow the rules and be sure consequences match the problem behavior; and
   c. Provide positive rewards when students do behave.
Several obstacles may stand in your way as you try to achieve assertive discipline. First, you will not be able to influence a student, if you do not believe you can. It’s easy to make excuses for poor student behavior, such as heredity, ignorance, peer pressure, inadequate parenting, socio-economic background, or environment. You need to recognize the difference between students who cannot control their actions and those who can, but choose not to control them. Even many students with disabilities can choose whether to display good or poor behavior, as referenced in Unit D.

Don’t forget you must identify a student’s individual needs for a given bus trip; they may be different for field trips than for routine trips. You must also be able to clearly state these needs to all students on the bus. Tell all students you expect them to behave well and tell them the consequences, should they choose to behave poorly. Reinforce these directives by following through with appropriate actions. This includes praise when a student does something well and discipline for poor behavior. All students must receive the same disciplinary sanctions, but recognize some students need more attention and support than others. Misbehavior in a student may indicate the need for extra attention.

No disciplinary plan is foolproof. Some students will continue to misbehave even when you have acted correctly. Sometimes you will need to ask the help of other drivers, a teacher, or the principal in dealing with a particular student or situation. The assertive discipline plan is a necessary tool for routine student management.

**BE ASSERTIVE!**

### GANG AWARENESS

One unique student discipline problem that may arise is gangs. Gangs have become commonplace in most cities, and unfortunately their members and activities are present on the school bus. Kids are entering gangs as early as elementary school. While you, as a school bus driver, cannot control who is or is not recruited, you can report unusual or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor. Under no circumstances are you, the bus driver, to confront gang leaders or potential gang members. Explain to your bus riding students the rules of the bus (what is and is not acceptable behavior). If they misbehave, follow district policy.

Gang activity is extremely serious and sometimes deadly. Never interfere. Should you see gang signs or symbols on the outside or inside of the bus, report it and then remove it. If you or your students are approached by gang members, avoid a confrontation, leave the area as quickly and as safely as possible, then report the incident to your dispatcher.

### GANGS AND THE BUS DRIVER

Gang members generally bother kids who are not in gangs and are usually more interested in fighting rival gangsters, not a school bus driver. They usually associate only with fellow gang members. It is important to set and enforce rules on the school bus and at the school bus stop. Gang members need to know the school and school bus stop are neutral zones, and gang violence will not be tolerated. When speaking to a suspected gang member, do not disrespect the gang, their family members or friends. Speak one-on-one with the student, and do not belittle them. Treat them with the same respect all students deserve. If they misbehave, follow local school district policies.

Make sure you report all incidents that appear to be suspicious to the proper school district official. Listen to the kids on your bus since they often know what is going to happen long before the school district official or police are made aware of a problem. Some school districts may have 24-hour tip lines students should be aware of, if they are afraid to come to you. Refer to your school district policy.
A few summary points when dealing with gang issues:

1. Be assertive, decisive, firm, and fair. Lenient treatment of gang members is viewed as a weakness, and they will take advantage of your “weakness.”

2. Intimidation of gang members usually escalates into a confrontation and seldom creates respect. Remember, lectures to scare “gangsters straight” DO NOT WORK!

3. When gang graffiti is found, report it and remove it as soon as possible. It will attract rival gangs and/or invite more “writing on the wall” and vandalism of your bus.

4. Prevent conflict whenever possible. Experience has proven that an incident, no matter how minor today, can cause more gang-related or motivated acts of vengeance or reprisals as much as two or more years later.

5. Never insult or show disrespect for a gang member, particularly in front of his or her peers. In the gang subculture, no insult goes unchallenged.

6. Never be critical of gang clothing, slang, tattoos, jewelry, hand signs, rap music, graffiti, or other indicators of the gang subculture. This would be an obvious form of disrespect.

7. Never confront gang status, only behavior.

8. Never confront a gang member in the company of their gang peers. This invites resistance in normal society let alone in the gang subculture.

9. Never mimic gang activity by affecting a gang stance or throwing a gang hand sign.

10. Never call a gang member a “wannabe.” This is openly disrespectful and may induce the individual to prove you have underestimated them.

11. Never place rival gang members together.

12. Never assume you are safe just because you are encountering a gang member in a school bus.

13. Never physically confront a gang member.

14. Never underestimate the threat from a young or small gang member.

15. Never assume anything.

**BULLYING AND HARASSMENT ON THE SCHOOL BUS**

While there is a great deal of research in the topics of bullying and harassment in the school setting, relatively little has been investigated in these topics on the way to or from school or on the school bus. One of the few recent studies that has been completed with high school students found more students reported being fearful of their peers on the school bus than they were during any other time of their school day (DeLara, 2000; 2002).

Harassment includes unfair and disrespectful remarks, written words, or pictures that are unpleasant and offensive. Similarly, a person is bullied when they are exposed repeatedly over time to the negative actions of one or more other students. These actions may range from stares and teasing up to and including physical assault. Research has found that two incidents of bullying occur on each bus ride, and a full bus and poorly supervised conditions are prime environmental factors for bullying (Raskauskas, 2005).

Sexual harassment, in particular, appears to be rampant among secondary students with 80 percent of students reporting sexual harassment, and half of all students admitting they sexually harass others (AAUW, 2001). This type of harassment has also been reported among middle school age students. In fact, one university researcher has indicated sexual harassment is a much more serious issue in public schools than most people have been willing to admit, and it’s much more likely to occur in unsupervised venues like buses or bathrooms (Williamson and Aratani, 2005). Remember that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is illegal according to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, which protects the adolescent at work, and Title IX of 1972, which protects the teen from sex discrimination at school.
DESCRIPTION OF HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

Harassment includes unwelcome remarks or behavior that shows disrespect for its victims. It hurts and harms the students in long-lasting ways. No student should be treated in this manner.

- It is a deliberate or repeated behavior, which is unwelcome, not asked for, and not returned.
- It is intentional.
- The behavior can be verbal, nonverbal, visual, and/or physical.
- Examples of verbal harassment could include teasing someone about their body development or body parts; telling dirty sexist jokes; calling others names that have a negative sexual meaning; or saying something to someone about sexual acts.
- Examples of nonverbal harassment could include looking at another person in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable (suggestive looks, leering, staring), obscene gestures or whistling.
- Examples of visual harassment could include glaring or staring; obscene/ suggestive letters, notes, or graffiti; obscene/suggestive pictures taped on notebooks.
- Examples of physical harassment could include “purposely” brushing against someone’s body; “friendly” pats, pinches, grabs and holds; pulling down someone’s gym shorts; or using force to “physically hold/ corner” a person in one place.
- Examples of cyber bullying could include the use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, pagers, cell phones, or other forms of information technology to deliberately and repeatedly, harass, taunt, ridicule, threaten, or intimidate someone. This can occur on the bus or at a bus stop.
- The word “unwelcome” places responsibility on the receiver to tell the sender the behavior is unwanted.
- The student who is a victim may:
  a. Suffer from loss of confidence or self-esteem;
  b. Find it hard to study and pay attention; and
  c. Dread or even avoid going to school or sports in which they anticipate harassment.

School personnel have a legal responsibility to protect students from known or reasonably foreseeable harm occurring during or in connection with school activities.

Harassment and bullying are not limited to children. Often the school bus driver has been the victim of harassment. If you feel as though you have been harassed, report the incident to your supervisor.

The bus driver should expect all students to travel with dignity and respect, and to arrive at school safely and ready to learn. In the transportation arena, we have an opportunity and obligation to be role models who will display and expect respect is always the order of the day. If a student confides in you, listen, and show understanding and support.

When you hear unkind, and humiliating remarks, respond immediately.

In her exploratory study, DeLara (2008) outlined the following strategies developed BY school bus operators, FOR school bus operators to help combat bullying and harassment:

1. Seat who are susceptible to bullying or being victimized children close to the driver;
2. Separate children who are fighting or having difficulty and assign seats;
3. Be “aware of everything” and watch for the moods and signs of troubled kids;
4. Talk with bullies about being respectful on the bus;
5. Intervene before anything happens and discuss with students;
6. Maintain a good relationship with each child;
7. Ask about interests and hobbies;
8. Try to engage potential bullies in positive conversations; and
9. Above all, talk to students with respect.

These strategies build on the strengths of aggressive children and distract them from disrespectful and disruptive behavior.

In cases of bullying or harassment, you as the school bus operator must document and report all incidents and allegations. Take all your concerns to your supervisor, principal or other designated school personnel.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT

In some unfortunate circumstances, you may encounter a situation where levels of bullying or harassment have severely escalated. School bus drivers have the unique opportunity to get to know their students. Often the same driver will be assigned to a route transporting the same students for several years. This gives drivers the chance to develop relationships with students that other district staff may not have. Because of this level of trust, it is possible that a student may disclose information to a driver or the driver may begin to observe behavior leading to a suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

Each school district and/or transportation department should have specific policies and procedures that must be followed to facilitate reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect. This may include specific forms for documentation or a designated contact person. Know your district’s policies and procedures for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect.

Whether you are reporting through district channels or directly to Child Protective Services (CPS), the following information is needed to the extent available:

• Name, address, and age of child;
• Name and address of custodial parent/guardian;
• Nature and extent of injury/injuries;
• Nature and extent of neglect;
• Nature and extent of sexual abuse.;
• Evidence of previous injuries, including nature and extent; and
• Any other pertinent information supporting the reasonable suspicion of abuse, neglect, or the perpetrator.

The law protects any person reporting or testifying regarding suspected child abuse and neglect. You are immune from any liability resulting from such reporting/testimony.