

TIP SHEET

Getting Ready for the First Day on the School Bus



The very first day of school is a big step in your child's life. The first ride on the school bus is just as important as the first day at school itself. When you pause to think about it, the school bus ride will be the first and last part of your child's school day. As a parent, you can plan ahead to make this a comfortable new experience.

There are many ways that parents and caregivers can prepare children for riding on the bus. Here is a list of ideas to help get ready for the first big day:

- Ask at the school about the rules of riding on the school bus. It is reassuring for parents and children when they already know what to expect when they step onto the bus for the first time. See if a bus buddy can be arranged for children with limited vocabulary.
- Create a personalized storybook about the first day of school. See the Tip Sheets in Creating Social Stories for ideas. You might start with "My Mom says I'm big enough to go to school." Read the story with your child. Leave it out for them to read so they can become more familiar with idea of riding the bus.
- Put together a Parent Book for you. Include a list of contact numbers, bus stop times, driver's name, arranged seating plan for your child and destination. You may also want to include: characteristics of your child, the strengths and needs of your child, list of bus rules, helpful tips for parents (this tip sheet).
- Make a bus riding sequence using the Visuals Engine.
- Create a matching game like Concentration. Use bus-related symbols, pictures or traffic signs relating to schools & school bus safety.
- Drive the bus route to school. During the car ride, encourage children to practice the school bus safety rules (speak softly, keep hands & feet to yourself).
- Check with your school about the First Rider Program. It gives new students and their parents a close-up look at riding the school bus.
- On a rainy day, pretend you are going on a bus ride. Line up some chairs in your house as though they were seats on a bus. Practice saying together,

“Sit in your seat and tuck in your feet.”

- Draw and colour pictures of children following school bus safety rules. Check online for printable colouring pages.
- Have a Dress Rehearsal Morning. Get up early and rehearse getting ready for the school bus.

Tips For Parents:

When arranging for specialized bus services:

- Be positive
- Know your child’s strengths and needs
- Be assertive and calm
- Make requests rather than demands
- Share strategies that work with your child at home

When communicating with the bus driver:

- Keep conversation short, the driver must be at the next stop on time
- Speak in a positive way about the school and its staff, your child is listening
- Inquire about how your child behaves on the bus and how it is handled
- Communicate before any problems escalate

Communicate openly with the bus driver and other adults that your child will see during their school day. Tell them about important changes in your child’s life. The appropriate adjustments can be made using your updates. Work together as a team to help your child have a positive experience at school.

Check online with your school board and province for local rules and information regarding school bus travel.

Tips for Child Care Professionals:

Children may need to get on (load) or get off the bus (unload) while they are in your care. Here are a few suggestions to help prepare them for the first big day:

- Have children paint a big yellow box (school bus). Role play the first trip on the bus. This can be done in the Drama Centre or outside. Include backpacks and pretend lunches in the Drama Centre.
- It is useful for you to have the same information that parents do, like bus safety. Ask parents about bus safety information at the same time as school schedules. Bus rules that are consistent at home and child care are much easier to follow.
- For safety and consistency reasons, set up a Bus Stop Safety Plan. The plan may include 10 steps out, 10 steps over, designated partners/ buddies, following the teacher/ leader/ adult
- Practice the bus rules with the children as an activity in your regular program.
- Review the bus rules as you are walking to the bus stop together. Start a sentence and have the child fill in the key word. “You only cross in front of the bus when (who?) THE BUS DRIVER signals that it is safe.” “Sit in your seat and tuck in your FEET.” “What kind of voice do you use while you are on the bus?”

For more information:

- [First day on the School Bus workshop](#)
- [Worried About Starting School Tip Sheet](#)
- [Preparing for Transitions](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Education \(includes 72 Ontario School Board Sites\)](#)