



## **Bullying on the School Bus: A Safety Issue for Bus Drivers**

### **Why Do School Bus Drivers Need to Know About Bullying?**

Bullying Can and Does Happen on the Bus. The daily duties and goals of any school bus driver are to professionally and safely supervise and transport students. Bullying problems on the bus have the potential to interfere with these duties and responsibilities. When bullying behaviors on a bus are misunderstood, go undetected or are ignored they can have serious consequences for everyone involved. Some of today's high-profile bullying lawsuits include bus incidents and liability issues for bus drivers, their employers and contractors.

### **Why Does Bullying Happen On School Buses?**

School buses can be easy places for bullies to hide and carry out their behaviors. Buses are often crowded places with lots of students moving quickly through doors and aisles. In close quarters, shoving, pinching, kicking and threatening can happen quickly without much notice. It is easy to call some bullying behaviors accidents when most students on the bus just want to get on and get moving. During the bus ride, a bully can have a hostage target, more time to bully and an audience of other students to watch the abuse.

Some bullies may see a bus driver as someone who has no direct authority over them. They may feel that the driver has a very limited relationship with students on the bus. Bullies may simply see a driver as an adult who is being distracted by the goal of safely driving the bus, a person who has little time to protect students on the bus.

On the other side of the problem, some bus drivers may not be aware that bullying problems have the potential to be both safety and legal issues. Some drivers may also be hesitant to involve themselves in confrontations with students.

### **What Bullying Is and What Bullying Is Not**

Any adult who shares responsibility for the security and well being of students needs a basic understanding of bullying in order to recognize, prevent and/or respond to the behaviors.

Bullying is a form of social violence that can also be called harassment. Bullying behaviors can be both physical and emotional in nature. Bullies build relationships based on power, control and intentional harm-doing. Bullies typically choose to target students who in some way(s) are weaker than themselves. These targets also tend to be students who will not fight back or tell others what is happening. Bullies repeat their abuse, and if they are not stopped, will tend to bully more often and in more harmful ways. Successful bullies may also begin to choose more targets to bully.

Bullying breaks the law when it becomes extortion, theft, assault, battery, arson, weapons possession, rape, murder, hate crime, sexual assault or a violation of civil rights.

Bullying is not an accident. Bullying is not a harmless game or innocent behavior. Bullying is not just a phase that kids go through. Bullying is not a way to toughen-up kids or keep them in-line or to put them in their place.



### **What Do Bus Bullies Do?**

Some bullies on the bus may be continuing the bullying activities they are carrying on during the school day. Some may be limiting their bullying behaviors to bus rides and bus stops.

Bullies on a bus can act in **direct ways**. These may include hitting, tripping, shoving, pinching, excessive tickling, verbal threats, name calling, racial slurs, insults, demanding money, property, service; and stabbing, choking and shooting.

Bullies on a bus can also act in **indirect ways**. These may include rejecting, excluding, isolating, spreading rumors about family, ranking or rating, humiliating, establishing pecking orders, manipulating friends and relationships, written threats and put-downs, blackmailing, terrorizing, and proposing dangerous dares.

### **What are the Signs That A Student May be Experiencing Bullying On the Bus?**

Targets of bus bullying may act scared, unsure or be hesitant to ride the bus. They may try to protect themselves by boarding the bus first or last and then staying close to the driver. A driver may notice ripped clothing, destroyed or ruined personal property, school books, homework/school projects. There may be obvious physical injuries or bruises. Targets may complain about of stolen property or money. Some students may stop riding the bus or stop coming to school. Targets of bullying may not seek help because they fear being hurt in more serious ways. If left unsupported or unprotected, targets of bullying may take matters in their own hands and seek their own means of justice.

### **Is it Teasing or Is It Bullying?**

#### **Acts of hurtful teasing are more often unintended.**

Teasers tend to stop once they have been told that their behaviors are inappropriate, break the rules and/or come with consequences. They are motivated to change their behaviors because they understand that their actions are unfair or unkind or because they do not want trouble or discipline problems for themselves.

**Bullying behaviors are always intended.** The only interest bullies have in the hurt feelings of others is to know that their bullying is working. When bullies are caught, they typically deny their behaviors, blame the target(s), pretend to be sorry, or will find more hidden ways to bully. Bullies find power and other rewards from hurting or humiliating others. Bullies bully because they can.

### **What Can a Bus Driver Do About Bullying?**

- R** Review school, bus and driver policies regarding harassment/bullying.
- E** Express your behavior expectations to the students who ride your bus.
- S** Share any behavior concerns or problems with your supervisors and school officials.
- P** Put your concerns in writing, document problems and your actions.
- O** Observe student activities and behaviors that occur in and around your bus.
- N** Never assume that the bullying problem will just go away.
- D** Don't be one more bully on the bus. Supervise kids by modeling respect and civility.

**KNOW** that in some cases you may be the only or first adult who has become aware of an actual or potential bullying problem.



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