# School Bus Safety Talking Points

Join the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s safety initiative to educate the public about school bus safety.

**General**

* School buses are statistically the safest way to transport school children.
* The school bus loading and unloading area is called the “Danger Zone.” Specifically, this is any side of the bus where a child may not be seen by the bus driver and, therefore, is in the most danger. These areas include:
  + 10 feet in front of the bus, where the driver may be sitting too high to see a child
  + 10 feet on either side of the bus, where a child may be in the driver’s blind spots
  + Behind the school bus
* Young children are most likely to be struck because they:
  + may hurry to get on and off the bus, or
  + might assume motorists will see them and wait for them to cross the street.

**Illegal School Bus Passing**

* While the school bus is one of the safest modes of transportation, illegal school bus passing is a significant threat to children and their caretakers.
* In every state, it is illegal for vehicle drivers to pass a school bus while the school bus stop-arm is extended, and the red lights are flashing.
* Failing to stop for a school bus could result in injury or death to child pedestrians or their caregivers.
* Vehicle drivers must always come to a complete stop when a school bus stop-arm is extended, and the red lights are flashing.
* Drivers should obey all traffic signs and signals.
* More injuries and fatalities occur outside of or near a school bus because a motorist has failed to obey the stop-arm warning or has failed to follow local traffic laws.
* A driver in a school-bus-related crash could be charged with one of the following:
  + A violation for passing a stopped school bus
  + A related factor of passing a school bus when prohibited by posted signs, pavement markings, or school bus displaying warning not to pass, and the crash was school-bus-related.
* The most dangerous part of the school bus ride is getting on and off the school bus.

**Safety Reminders for Parents and Caregivers**

* Arrive at the bus stop five minutes early.
* Stand at least 5 giant steps (10 feet) away from the edge of the road.
* Wait until the bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says it’s okay before stepping onto the bus.
* Be careful that clothing with drawstrings and book bags with straps or dangling objects do not get caught in the handrail or door when exiting the bus.
* Walk at least 10 feet in front of the bus; never walk behind the bus.
* Be sure the bus driver can always see you, and you can see the bus driver.
* Before crossing the street, stop and look left-right-left before crossing.
* Statistically, students are at increased danger during daylight savings when it may be dark at their bus stop for pick-up or drop off. Consider wearing bright colors or reflective items.

**Safety Reminders for Motorists**

* The overall best practice is to “always stop if there’s a school bus.”
* Yellow flashing lights indicate the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.
* Motorists may begin moving **only** when the red flashing lights are turned off, the stop arm is withdrawn, and the bus begins to move.
* Never pass on the right side of the bus, where children enter or exit. This is illegal and can have tragic results.
* The greatest risk to a child isn’t riding a school bus but approaching or leaving one. That’s why, as a vehicle driver, it is especially important to pay attention. Students’ lives are on the line.
* Slow Down. Watch for children walking in the street, especially if there are no sidewalks in the neighborhood. Watch for children playing and gathering near bus stops.
* Don’t drive distracted. Be alert. Children arriving for the bus may dart into the street without looking for traffic.
* Watch out for young people who may be distracted and not paying attention to the traffic around them.

**Other**

* While school bus safety is important throughout the school year, during National School Bus Safety Week in October we bring heightened awareness to the issue.
* For more information on school bus safety, visit https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/school-bus-safety.

**Stats**