



Bullying on the School Bus

Amended from the National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT) Bullying White Paper

Is bullying on school buses common?

It's hard to say for sure, but it's definitely a significant problem.

The school bus is, in many respects, a rolling classroom and many of the challenges that exist there also exist on the bus, perhaps to an even greater extent. There are typically far more children on a school bus than in a classroom and the bus driver has to manage them all while operating a 10 ton vehicle - and facing the opposite direction! It's an incredibly tough job, made even more so by bullying among students that's often done in sneaky ways that the driver may not be able to observe easily.

We know parents need more factual information about school buses. A 2006 survey conducted by the American School Bus Council (ASBC) revealed that for the most part, parents think the bus is a safe way to transport their children to and from school and rarely hear of school bus accidents. However, the same survey revealed parents are concerned about the bus driver's background and qualifications, which are rarely known outside of the transportation department, and parents are also concerned about student misbehavior on the bus, especially more serious situations like bullying.

In fact, one participant in a focus group stated, *"The older kids are so rowdy on the bus, they don't listen generally. And if a bus driver is always talking to them about being quiet, that's distracting him from driving."*

One thing is for sure: every driver knows that students who step aboard the bus have to cope with all kinds of issues, from problems at home and school to disputes with friends. We live in complicated times and all manner of social, demographic and economic factors affect children and their behavior.

What is NAPT's stance on bullying?

The short answer is that we have no tolerance for bullying and stopping it is one of our national public policy priorities.

The challenge for us is that while bullying occurs on school buses (and many other places) the root causes and solutions involve larger societal issues that are very complex. As an accountable and conscientious industry we want to be part of the solution but clearly do not have all the answers or ability to deal with them all effectively.

Bullying complaints must always be taken seriously and "the system" needs to provide a swift and thorough response when allegations are raised. No exceptions. Parents should never feel compelled to take matters into their own hands. They need the confidence that their child—whether on a school bus, at a bus stop, on a playground, or in the school rest room—will not be subjected to taunting, abuse or assaults from other children. Those who bully need to know that their behavior will not be tolerated.

How should school bus drivers deal with bullying?

School bus drivers are very limited in what they can do when a behavioral incident occurs on their bus because dealing with it could involve compromising the safe operation of the bus and/or getting children to and from school on schedule. They are professionals whose primary responsibility is to operate the bus safely. They are carefully screened when hired, and undergo continuous training on driving proficiency/safety and in recent years also receive training in security awareness. But they are not social workers, deputized law enforcement officers or even responsible for disciplining students.

From a practical standpoint, bullying often occurs in a “below the radar” way that the driver may not be able to observe. Stopping the bus and walking back through the aisle to check out every suspected conflict between students is just not possible.

Many buses have cameras installed to monitor students on and around the bus. These cameras make it easier to identify those responsible for bullying or other aberrant behavior. Most buses also have two way communications so drivers can report immediately any serious situation aboard a bus. But it is up to school administrators to investigate and take action when bullying occurs.

Okay, but what should I do if my child is bullied on a school bus?

Bullying incidents understandably trigger strong emotional responses from parents but, PLEASE, think before you act. Get all the facts and focus on constructive action. You will be most successful if you are persistent in respectfully demanding a response.

NAPT recommends the following steps for parents who want to get action promptly but responsibly:

1. Report the Incident Immediately to the Principal of Your Child’s School. Call the school and insist on speaking to the principal. Follow up as many times as necessary until you actually speak with the principal. Request that your child’s classroom teacher be notified about the incident, and ask an approximate date for when you should hear back. Provide the following information:

- Your name and contact numbers
- Your child’s name
- Date and location of the incident
- Detailed account of what happened—the facts as you know them
- Names of parties involved
- Names of witnesses who can collaborate
- Police contact and report number (if a police report was made)

2. Report the Incident to the School District Transportation Department,

<http://www.d11.org/transportation/>. Call the school district’s transportation department at **520-2940** and ask to speak to the director or a supervisor. Tell them your child reported to you an incident of bullying on one of their buses and ask that the driver be interviewed to get the facts. Request that the findings be reported to the school principal, along with any videotape record from the bus (if there is one). If you would like to talk directly to the school bus driver, ask that the driver or his/her supervisor call you.

3. Involve Law Enforcement (*if necessary*). If the incident on the bus involved a threat of harm, or actual physical assault, contact local police immediately and fill out a complaint report, even before contacting the school principal. This will create a public record and the police will investigate the incident.

4. Schedule a Meeting with the Principal of Your Child’s School. If you don’t get action within a reasonable period (bullying is serious and response should be swift), ask for a personal meeting with the school principal to register your concern face to face and underscore your resolve. Ask for the following: Copy of the student handbook

- Look over the school district’s bullying policies: [JICDE](#)
- Look over the school district’s discipline code: [JICDA](#)
- An assessment of how the investigation is proceeding (timeline, etc.) and expected resolution.

5. Involve the School Superintendent (*if necessary*). If the principal’s response is unsatisfactory and/or not prompt, request a meeting with the superintendent of schools for your school district. Bring along as many documented facts as possible, and request intervention.

Can bullying be eliminated?

The answer, unfortunately, is nobody knows for sure. It will take a concerted effort by parents, school officials, school bus industry, psychologists and law enforcement to come up with rational ways to both prevent it and provide meaningful sanctions for those who bully. One thing is certain: Vigilantism cannot be a part of the solution. It's inappropriate, contrary to common sense rules of a civil society and dangerous, especially when children are involved. As an industry we are committed to being fully engaged in the discussion.

So what can I do as a parent to prevent bullying?

Get involved! It is crucial that parents, educators, administrators, health care professionals, and researchers work together to reduce bullying. Rather than wait until an incident occurs, concerned parents should ensure that their child's school system has a policy regarding bullying, as District 11 does. Read over the policy and ideas of ways to handle bullying.

Dealing with student behavior problems is part of driver training and awareness, but the degree and content of that training varies from community to community. Many school bus drivers, like teachers, have had formal training to deal with bullying. Please see the D11 transportation behavioral guidelines and disciplinary procedures for more information on how student behavior is managed on the bus:

<http://www.d11.org/Transportation/Pages/BusRules.aspx>

Finally, it is important to have a consistent open dialogue with your children about bullying and its consequences. Be actively involved in your children's lives and intervene in a supportive and empathetic way if you believe your child or another child is being bullied.

Please feel free to contact NAPT - toll free – at 800-989-NAPT (6278) or at: <http://www.naptonline.org/> if you think we can help you or if you think you can help us. We are committed to eliminating and preventing bullying and we are willing to work with anyone and everyone who seeks this same end.

Additional Resources on Bullying:

- Take a Stand, Lend a Hand, And Stop Bullying Now! : <http://www.stopbullying.gov>
- Stop Bullying Now: <http://stopbullyingnow.com/index.html>
- Safe2Tell: <http://safe2tell.org/>
- Bill Besley's cyberbullying website— <http://www.cyberbullying.org/>
- Stop Cyberbullying— <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/>
- Cyberbullying Research Center- cyberbullying.us
- Stay Safer Online: [Wired Safety](http://www.wiredsafety.com/)
- Youth Info: <http://youth.gov/>
- Search Institutes Assets for Youth- <http://www.search-institute.org/about>
- GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network- glsen@glsen.org
- Inside/Out Youth Services: <http://www.insideoutys.org/>
- National Association for Pupil Transportation- <http://www.naptonline.org/>
- Teaching Tolerance- <http://www.tolerance.org/activity/bullying-tips-students>