



# Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation's School Buses

## MODULE

# 1

## Handout

# 1

### See Something: What Does Bullying Look Like?

**General definition:** Bullying is a problem behavior based on power relationships in which a student or a group of students uses power aggressively to cause emotional or physical pain and distress to another student. (7)

*Note: Numbers within parentheses refer to the source of the information presented in the handout. See the citation list at the end of the Trainer's Outline for this module.*

#### Four Types of Bullying (7, 2)

Put a check mark by how often you see this kind of behavior on the bus:

- 1. Physical bullying**—Hitting, kicking, inappropriate touching, sexual gestures, groping, threatening with/without a weapon.

1 = Never    2 = Occasionally    3 = Sometimes    4 = Frequently    5 = Very often

What the research says about how often this form of bullying occurs: \_\_\_\_\_

- 2. Verbal bullying**—Name calling, starting rumors, teasing, threats.

1 = Never    2 = Occasionally    3 = Sometimes    4 = Frequently    5 = Very often

What the research says about how often this form of bullying occurs: \_\_\_\_\_

- 3. Relational bullying**—Excluding others from the group, rolling of eyes, tossing of hair, ignoring and shunning, gossiping, spreading rumors, telling secrets, setting others up to look foolish, damaging friendships.

1 = Never    2 = Occasionally    3 = Sometimes    4 = Frequently    5 = Very often

What the research says about how often this form of bullying occurs: \_\_\_\_\_

- 4. Cyber bullying**—Use of e-mail, social network sites, cell phones, webcams, text messages, and Internet sites, etc., to embarrass or humiliate, verbally harass, socially exclude, or threaten physical or psychological harm.

1 = Never    2 = Occasionally    3 = Sometimes    4 = Frequently    5 = Very often

What the research says about how often this form of bullying occurs: \_\_\_\_\_

## Common Signs of Bullying\*

There are many warning signs that could indicate that someone is involved in bullying, either by bullying others or by being bullied. As a bus driver, you may be more likely to see some signs than others. For example, a parent would notice if a child is depressed and withdrawn at home, but you might be more likely to see how one child teases another while riding the bus or how a normally happy child you've seen often suddenly seems isolated and frightened. You may see changes in young people that you see every day or you may see patterns emerge over time.

Here are some of the common signs of bullying to look for:

- Possible signs of someone being bullied
  - Reports losing items such as books, electronics, clothing, or jewelry
  - Has unexplained injuries
  - Complains frequently of headaches, stomach aches, or feeling sick
  - Hurts themselves
  - Loses interest in visiting or talking with friends
  - Is afraid of going to/from school or other activities with peers
  - Appears sad, moody, angry, anxious, or depressed
  - Talks about suicide
  - Feels helpless
  - Suddenly has fewer friends
  - Avoids certain places
  - Acts differently than usual
  - Wants to sit near the driver
  - Wants to sit with the same “safe” student or group of students all of the time (behind them, in front of them or surrounded by them)
  - Wants to sit on the inside seat—not the aisle seat
  
- Possible signs of someone who is bullying others
  - Becomes violent with others
  - Gets into physical or verbal fights with others
  - Gets in trouble a lot including being sent to the principal's office or detention
  - Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained
  - Is quick to blame others
  - Will not accept responsibility for their actions
  - Has friends who bully others
  - Needs to win or be best at everything
  - Tries to move near enough to the student being bullied to continue bullying—for example, the bullying student may move near enough so the student being bullied can hear remarks, be touched, or be bothered
  - Vies for attention, talks loudly, waves at the driver in the mirror, or moves from seat to seat
  - Watches the driver and changes seats to be near the student being bullied when the driver is at an intersection or watching the road

\*Adapted from [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov). (15)

For additional copies of this handout, or additional information on bullying and supportive bus climate, visit <http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=9&eid=436>



# Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation's School Buses

## MODULE

# 1

## Handout

# 2

## Do Something: Dealing With Bullying Behaviors

Bus drivers can take steps *ahead of time* to prepare themselves and their students to create a safe and positive atmosphere on the bus that may help keep bullying from happening in the first place.

*Bus Discipline: A Positive Approach* by Randall Sprick and Geoff Colvin (1992) emphasizes the following five basic rules for managing student behavior on the bus: (14)

1. Be positive and professional.
2. Acknowledge responsible behavior.
3. Use consequences calmly, consistently, and immediately.
4. Provide continual supervision.
5. Anticipate and think ahead.

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Bus drivers can: (4, 9)

- Be up-to-date on their own school district's rules, regulations, and policies for dealing with bullying.
- Make sure all students understand a specific, easy-to-follow set of rules for entering, exiting, and riding the bus and why the rules are in place.
- Clearly establish your expectations for your students' behavior.
- Let students know that if something occurs about which they're concerned, they can quietly give you a note or communicate with you in some other way to let you know what's going on.

A bus driver's attitudes and interactions with students also can help establish a safe and positive atmosphere on the bus. Young people respond well to bus drivers who are: (9)

- Firm but not tough
- Courteous and not sarcastic
- Equal and fair with everyone
- Consistent

Before problems develop, you can:

- **Anticipate what to look for before the bus is in motion:** School bus drivers in one study reported seeing discipline problems increase in the afternoon (when children are tired) and before winter and spring breaks (when children look forward to being out of school). Anticipation may help drivers be better prepared to keep a sharp eye out for potential problem times and stresses when bullying may be more likely to occur. Post clearly a simple set of rules and reinforce them periodically. (11, 4)
- **Understand the different behaviors and needs of children of different ages:** Successful student management depends on understanding how children's minds work. Although not every child is alike, age and developmental level share certain broad characteristics. Different behavior management strategies are needed for each group. (4)

*Note: See Handout 3: "Understanding Young People."*

- **Learn “planned ignoring”:** Know when to ignore minor irritating behavior, such as occasional bursts of loud language or minor horseplay. Sometimes children merely want to provoke an adult for fun. But—never ignore potentially dangerous behavior, such as moving from seat to seat. (4)

Students say behavior is more positive when they feel a bond between the driver and students. (6) Following are a few quick tips for developing positive connections with your students: (4)

- **Get to know their names.** You may have a lot of students, but use their names when you can.
- **Greet them when they get on the bus.** This can be especially important in the afternoons when they’re tired and have had a long day.
- **Be a role model.** Model responsible, safe, and mature behavior for your students. If you want respect from the kids, give it to them. If you want kids to use “please” and “thank you,” use them yourself.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** The great majority of children are delightful to be around.

When bullying does occur on the bus, it is best to address it when you see it. It is not always possible or even desirable to stop the bus and deal with an incident, so try these strategies while driving only if it is safe to do so or after the bus has stopped: (4, 9)

- In an even tone, give a verbal warning for the behavior to stop.
- When the bus has stopped, move the affected child to a different seat.
- Consider seat assignments in the future.
- After the bus ride, talk to the student who was bullying about his or her behavior in a nonthreatening but firm and even-handed manner. Repeat the rules for riding the bus, and make sure he or she knows the consequences for not following the rules.
- Document and report incidences as required by your school district’s policies.

If a behavior escalates and you are concerned: (4)

- Call your supervisor about the behavior.
- If you feel you need to stop the bus to deal with the behavior, call in to inform your supervisor.
- If you must stop the bus, do so in a safe location, and then:
  1. Always follow district procedures.
  2. Secure the bus. Take the keys with you, for example, if you need to move around the bus.
  3. Stand up and speak to the student or students involved in the bullying.
  4. Change the seat of the student who was bullying and/or the student being bullied if needed.
  5. Never put a student off the bus except at school or at his or her residence or school bus stop. If you feel that the offense is serious enough that you cannot safely drive the bus, call a school administrator, law enforcement, or a parent or caregiver, as appropriate, to remove the student. You may also return to the school.
  6. When intervening, use caution not to challenge or provoke a student who is bullying because it may initiate further negative behavior.



# Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation's School Buses

## MODULE

# 1

## Handout

# 3

Successful student management depends on understanding how children's minds work. Students are not one-size-fits-all. Of course, every child has a unique personality, but each age and developmental level share certain broad characteristics. Different behavior management strategies are needed for each group. The following are general characteristics and concerns by grade level.

### Preschool Children

- Cognitive level varies widely for the same-age children. Some four-year-olds are remarkably mature and can converse fluently with adults; others are still in the early toddler stage.
- Separation anxiety from parents and guardians.
- Often fall asleep on the bus ride.
- May have trouble negotiating bus steps, getting into the bus seat, and fastening safety restraints.
- Our most vulnerable population for transporting.
- Inability to see outside the bus may lead to boredom-inspired misbehaviors.
- Communication with preschoolers must be very simple and clear. Repeating safety instructions numerous times usually will be necessary.
- They can be slow—adults need to be patient.
- Try to go to the child's level when speaking—bend down so you're face-to-face.

### Kindergartners

- Like preschoolers, kindergartners display a wide variation in abilities and maturity; for example, on the first few days of school, some kindergartners will be fully adjusted to the school routine, and some will seem like toddlers.
- Five-year-olds have short attention spans and are easily distracted, creating danger especially when loading or unloading. Kindergartners are most susceptible to a "by-own-bus" tragedy."
- May bolt impulsively across the road when they see their parents waiting for them—be careful!
- Physiological development (vision and hearing) is limited, increasing the risk when they must interact with roadway traffic. Ability to judge vehicle speed and distance is very limited.
- Kindergartners who have been exposed to immature adults may demonstrate a distressing command of obscene language.
- Often love their bus drivers and are usually receptive to clear, well-designed safety instruction and positive reinforcement techniques.
- A warm hello and a smile mean a great deal to them!

### Grades 1–3

- May be overly stimulated in the bus environment; clear, simple behavior expectations are essential.
- Still enjoy school buses—still a key time to teach them safety fundamentals.
- Often still want to be liked by adults.
- Often demonstrate concrete thinking—right or wrong, no in-between.
- Some exclusion and even bullying of different, delayed, or timid peers may occur.

### Grade 4–8

- Becoming independent individuals.
- Great concern with peer relations—while adults' opinions still matter, they don't matter nearly as much as those of their peers. Direct challenges in front of the entire bus will often lead to face-saving and increased defiance.
- Self-conscious, awkward, unsure of themselves.
- May shun or belittle those outside the “in group.” Bullying and harassment are prevalent unless adults monitor group interactions.
- Prone to illogical or even self-destructive decisions. May purposely ignore safety rules for peer attention.

### Grade 9–12

- Some continuation of middle school issues as they grow into adulthood.
- Further growing sense of self-identity—positive or negative.
- Badly want to be treated like adults, and behavior management is most effective when they are treated in that fashion.
- Still appreciate adult friendliness and connection in spite of outward “coolness.”

*Note: Numbers within parentheses refer to the source of the information presented in the handout. See the citation list at the end of the Trainer's Outline for this module.*

\*Used by permission and adapted from *NAPT 405: Student Needs and Management*, Professional Development Series. (4)

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# Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation's School Buses

## MODULE

# 1

## Handout

# 4

### Techniques for De-escalating Student Behavior\*

Verbal de-escalation techniques are appropriate when no weapon is present. Reasoning with an enraged person is not possible. The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of arousal so that discussion becomes possible.

It is important to appear centered and calm even when we do not feel that way. It will help to practice these techniques before they are needed so they become “second nature.”

#### Maintain Control of Yourself and Your Emotions

1. Appear calm, centered, and self-assured. This will help everyone stay calmer, too.
2. Use a modulated, low tone of voice.
3. Do not be defensive—even if the comments or insults are directed at you, they are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses, or misconceptions about their roles.
4. Call the school, your supervisor, security, or the police if you need more help.
5. Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated student is very sensitive to feeling shamed and disrespected. We want him or her to know that it is not necessary to show us that they should be respected. We automatically treat them with dignity and respect.

#### Communicate Effectively Nonverbally

1. Allow extra physical space between you and the student—about four times your usual distance. Anger and agitation can fill the extra space between you and the student.
2. Get at the same eye level and maintain constant eye contact. Allow the student to break his or her gaze and look away if they need to.
3. Do not point or shake your finger.
4. Do not touch the student—even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. It could be easy for physical contact to be misinterpreted as hostile or threatening.
5. Keep hands out of your pockets and up and available to protect yourself, and stand at an angle to the student.

#### The De-escalation Discussion

1. Remember that there is no content except trying to calmly bring the level of arousal down to a safer place.
2. Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait until he or she takes a breath; then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
3. Respond selectively; answer only informational questions no matter how rudely asked (e.g., “Why do I have to sit here?”). Do not answer abusive questions (e.g., “Why are all bus drivers jerks?”). This question should get no response whatsoever.

4. Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but always respectful tone. Give choices where possible in which both alternatives are safe ones (e.g., “Would you like to continue our meeting calmly or would you prefer to stop now and come back tomorrow when things can be more relaxed?”).
5. Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior (e.g., “I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me or other students on the bus.”).
6. Do not solicit how a person is feeling or interpret feelings in an analytic way.
7. Do not argue or try to convince.
8. Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate (e.g., “Would you like to change seats on the bus?”).
9. Give the consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.
10. Represent external controls as institutional rather than personal.

Trust your instincts. There is nothing magic about talking someone down. You are transferring your sense of calm, respectful, clear limit setting to the agitated student in the hope that he or she actually wishes to respond positively to your respectful attention. Do not be a hero and do not try de-escalation when a person has a weapon. In that case, simply cooperate.

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\*Used by permission. Adapted from Skolnik-Acker, E. (2008). *Verbal De-Escalation Techniques for Defusing or Talking Down an Explosive Situation*. Boston: National Association of Social Workers, Massachusetts Chapter, Committee for the Study and Prevention of Violence Against Social Workers. (13)

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# Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation's School Buses

## MODULE

# 1

## Handout

# 5

### After the Bus Run: Follow-up and Reporting

Your responsibility does not stop when you drop a child off. As a caring professional, you may have concerns about students when a bullying incident does occur on the bus. Some questions you might ask yourself after a bullying incident could include:

- Does the young person who was bullied need attention?
- If so, should he or she be handed off to a school counselor, parent or caregiver, or other caring adult?
- Do I need to tell a waiting parent or caregiver, sibling, or other concerned adult if something has happened?
- Does the child who did the bullying need to be handed off or connected to school personnel, parent or caregiver, or other caring adult?
- How do I feel about what happened and my response to it?
- Do local district policies require filing a written report?

Your local school district's policies may require you to file discipline referrals or reports on any bullying incidences that occur on your bus. Use referrals wisely and properly (4) and follow these guidelines:

- Fill them out completely and legibly.
- Use referrals judiciously—never write up the whole bus!—and only after you have given appropriate verbal warning to the student.
- Report only what you are certain occurred.
- Avoid editorial comments (“Suzy is just like her brother! In fact, the whole family is a problem!”).
- Report what you observed as accurately and specifically as possible.
- Briefly explain how the student's behavior was dangerous to himself or herself, or other students—stress the “S-word” (safety).
- Unless school policy expressly forbids it, it is best to write down the actual curse words a student said so that the principal and the parent understand exactly what happened.

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You also may have a system for documenting issues to help manage student behavior or use in preparing for letters or meetings with parents, students, and school administrators. However you choose to document issues, focus on behaviors that need to change by identifying: (16a)

- Patterns of behavior
- Problem areas with individuals
- Problem areas with groups



# Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation's School Buses

## MODULE

# 1

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in the workshop. Your answers to the questions on this brief form will help us improve the workshop for others.

**Choose only *one* answer for each question.**

## Handout

# 6

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>This workshop effectively...</b>					
1. Provided a clear definition of bullying and what it might look like on my bus.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Introduced helpful principles for creating an atmosphere on my bus where bullying would be less likely to occur.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Provided clear ideas and strategies for addressing a range of bullying behaviors.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Equipped me to de-escalate student behaviors that may become hostile and aggressive.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Provided helpful guidelines for completing an effective referral or report.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>The presenter...</b>					
6. Possessed a solid knowledge of the subject matter.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Helped me understand the importance of my role as a school bus driver.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Encouraged me to try something new in dealing with or preventing bullying on my bus.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Overall...</b>					
9. The quality of this presentation was excellent.	5	4	3	2	1
10. After attending this workshop, I feel better prepared to deal with bullying behavior on my bus.	5	4	3	2	1

**Additional comments:**

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**I have been a school bus driver for:**

- 0–5 years       6–10 years       11–20 years       More than 20 years

**Thank you! Please return your completed form to the trainer.**

