

# School bus safety

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



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### Introduction

This is a quick guide to roles and responsibilities for school bus safety. It is aimed at school boards and senior leaders, bus controllers, and parents and caregivers.

What it covers:

- Talking to students about safety
- Student bus wardens
- The bus driver's responsibilities
- Advice for parents and other road users.

### More information

The Ministry of Education manages school buses through contracts with bus companies. It also provides safety information on its website. This includes:

- Sample code of conduct for students.
- Managing ongoing student behaviour issues.
- Reporting crashes and other incidents
- Driver vetting via the Children's Act.

Look for Managing safety, behaviour and accidents on school transport here:

 [School Transport \(Ministry of Education\)](#)

The Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency Education Portal includes the manual and training videos for School Traffic Safety Teams, including bus wardens.

 [Education Portal](#)



# Talking to students

More than 100,000 students use school buses in New Zealand. It is one of the safest ways to travel. Help your students learn the following tips to keep as safe as possible. A code of conduct is one starting point for reinforcing these practices.

- When waiting for the bus, stand well back from the road. Buses take up a lot of room when they pull in.
- Put your phone down and remove your headphones. Stay alert so you can hear and see dangers. Wait until you're on the bus to use your phone.
- Let the bus stop completely before you try to get on.
- Don't push and shove or try to get on as a big group.
- Let younger students get on first so they can safely find a seat.
- Carry your bag so it doesn't get caught in the door. Once you're in a seat, put your bag under the seat in front of you or on your lap.
- If you have to stand in the aisle, hold on to a seat back or rail. Keep your bag as close to you as possible on the floor so other people don't trip on it.
- Stay behind the driver. Listen to instructions from the driver and the wardens, they want to keep you safe.
- When you get off the bus, wait as far away from the edge of the road as you can until the bus drives away. Stay alert for traffic dangers.
- If you need to cross the road, wait until the bus has gone far away and use the kerb drill.

## Kerb drill

1. Find a safe place to cross.
2. Take one step back from the curb.
3. Look in all directions and listen for traffic.
4. If traffic is coming wait for it to pass, then look and listen again.
5. When there is no traffic, walk quickly across and be alert to any changes.



# Bus wardens

Bus wardens are students. They watch out the safety of fellow students using school buses. They are selected and supervised by school staff. Training is usually done by Police school community officers. Bus wardens ensure:

- an orderly entry onto the bus, from a bus assembly area
- the driver is made aware of passenger list changes, especially in small rural schools
- passengers are safely seated, or – if seats are unavailable – standing well clear of the exit well and driver's seat (floor markings often indicate safe standing position)
- all bags are put down safely
- their own position gives the best view of all passengers. A second warden close to the front door can help younger children get off the bus or cross the road
- students remain seated until the bus stops, before getting up to exit
- students are aware of expected behaviour
- misbehaviour is reported to the supervising teacher
- emergency procedures are followed after a crash or other incident.

## Emergencies: what bus wardens may do

Usually, the driver will direct wardens. However, wardens should know the location of emergency exits, fire extinguishers and first aid kits. Here's what else they may know about.

First aid. Deliver first aid if trained.

Report. Get help by phoning 111. Give a precise location, rough numbers of passengers and numbers injured. Two students should go together if making a call requires leaving the scene.

Protect scene. If possible, two pairs of older students would position themselves somewhere safe about 200 metres from the bus in both directions to warn oncoming vehicles. Traffic must be stopped before any evacuation proceeds.

Scene safe and secure. Once approaching traffic has stopped, one person from each pair reports back.

Selection of safe assembly area. If bus evacuation is necessary, a safe and preferably dry area well clear of the road is selected. Ask an older student to stand there.

Bus evacuation. Ensure clear directions are given and help those in need. If emergency exits are used, help passengers climb down to road level. You may need to cover broken glass if windows are shattered. It's often best to not move people with serious injuries. But do keep them company, which is reassuring while waiting for emergency services.

Wait at safe assembly area. Encourage students to sit together while those supervising remain standing. A seated group is easier to look after. Insist that no one leaves the group unless released by a responsible adult.

# Bus drivers

School bus drivers are kept informed of the following roles and procedures.

## Bus wardens

How bus wardens and bus drivers work together on safety and positive behaviour.

## Student behaviour

Schools may develop their own code of conduct for students, covering safety, respectful behaviour and any local contexts. Bus drivers should be kept informed of this, on top of general expectations for students as described by the Ministry of Education. This includes:

- When I am a seated passenger, I remain in my seat for the whole journey.
- I don't eat on the bus or throw anything.
- If I am standing, I am quiet and do not push or move around the bus.
- I respect other students and their property (this includes no verbal or physical abuse, or other behaviour that distracts the driver).
- I use acceptable language and don't shout.
- I respect the bus company's property (no standing on seats or vandalism).
- I understand any damage I cause to the bus will result in my caregiver being billed for the cost of repairs.
- I don't do anything that could put the driver or other students at risk.
- I always follow instructions of the bus driver and the teacher responsible for bus travel.

## Dealing with breaches of behaviour

Inappropriate behaviour is reported to the transport service provider (bus company) who then contact the bus controller or school.

The school will take steps to manage this behaviour. The student could lose their place on the school bus (temporarily or permanently).

Drivers are NOT permitted to pull over and remove offending students from the bus. Generally, the route must be completed, and all students delivered to their usual stops.

In extreme cases, if the driver decides it is unsafe to continue, they can pull over. They then call their employer and then follow their procedures. This may include calling the Police or school to remove the students concerned.

## Response to bus crashes or incidents

- The driver or transport service provider phones 111 for emergency services.
- The provider then contacts the bus controllers of schools on the route, and the regional Ministry of Education transport contract manager.
- Bus controllers inform school principals.
- Police will contact caregivers or next of kin for serious injury or death.
- Bus controllers or principals notify caregivers of any students with less serious injuries.

## Crash or incident follow-up

Further investigations and reports are likely. Actions may involve the transport service provider, Ministry of Education transport contract manager, NZ Police commercial vehicle safety team and WorkSafe.



[Accidents and incidents on school transport \(Ministry of Education\)](#)

## Safety tips for families and road users

Please discuss safety around the school bus with your community. This can be a topic for school newsletters, meetings and social media. Encourage two-way dialogue – families are extra pairs of eyes on the local bus route and can raise concerns as part of a strategy of prevention. They also have important responsibilities as road users.

Students entering and exiting the bus are vulnerable to passing vehicles, and drivers must take great care when they encounter school buses.

### Critical tips to share:

- Reduce speed to 20 km/h when passing a school bus and keep an eye out for children who may walk out onto the road.
- If you are dropping children off or collecting them from a bus stop, stand well back from the edge of the road and out of the way of the bus.
- Wait on the same side of the road to collect your child in a rural area so they don't have to cross.



[Bus safety \(Waka Kotahi\)](#)