

DISTRACTIONS AND DRIVING

Staying Focused Means Safety for All

Most distractions are harmless. When driving, however, the consequences can be serious and even deadly. [Each year](#), distracted motorists cause 1.6 million motor vehicle accidents, 645,000 injuries and 6,000 deaths.

What distracts us from the complex task of driving? Distractions can be internal (thoughts) or external (sound, motion, touch and smell). Here are a few examples from a school bus driver's perspective.




External Distractions

- Motorists' sudden moves, loud music from a passing car, an accident or construction scene
- Coworkers waving "hi" while leaving for your route in the morning or parking
- Inside the bus: unruly students, radio transmissions, cell phones ringing (yours or students')

Internal Distractions

- Thinking about what you'll do after work
- Replaying an argument with a spouse or coworker

- Worrying about your health, medicinal side effects, or being overtired

———— Stay Focused ————
When Checking for Children
Focusing is critically important when checking for children on the bus. Never rely on habit, routine or a checklist during this important task. Instead of ensuring a child is not on the bus, assume there is  him or her. As you make your way slowly down and back up the aisle, say aloud, "I am looking for a child."

The Multi-Tasking Myth

Research by The [National Institutes of Health](#) confirms it's impossible to think about two things at the same time. Instead, the brain switches back and forth, sometimes very quickly. That means reading a route sheet, talking on the radio, or disciplining students temporarily takes attention away from driving. These are all normal occurrences for a school bus driver; but awareness of the brain's limitations reminds us to limit such distractions.

Avoiding Distraction

- Don't let noise or movement outside or inside the bus divert your focus – especially during loading and unloading.
- Ignore parking lot greeting and explain why later. And, never distract other drivers!
- Never e-mail, text or use any portable electronic device while driving. It's

the most common cause of distracted driving accidents and illegal in [NYS](#).

- Keep glances in the rear mirror brief. Imagine closing your eyes for five seconds while traveling at 50 miles an hour. Would you notice a motorist suddenly stopping in front of you? Pull over if students get out of hand.
- Leave personal issues outside the bus.
- Get enough sleep. Tell your supervisor if you're too ill to drive or worried about medicines. It's safer to have a healthy, alert and well-rested substitute behind the wheel.
- When your mind wanders repeat to yourself, "Focus on the road."
- Did you know distractions significantly shrink your field of vision (see graphic)? Be aware of this phenomenon and, when it happens, deliberately widen your scope of vision.

An Undistracted Driver's Field of Vision

A Distracted Driver's Field of Vision

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

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BOUNDARIES

Appropriate Boundaries with Students: It's Up to You

We all know the discomfort we feel when someone stands too close in an elevator or says something inappropriate. We have instincts about our “comfort zone” and react when someone crosses that line.

Children, however, may not have an inner sense of appropriate boundaries, and they depend on adults to lead by example.



That means it is up to you to set and maintain appropriate verbal, physical, and relationship boundaries between you and your students. Your goal as a professional school bus driver is to transport students safely; but that goal includes an element of “social safety.” These guidelines can help you achieve that goal.

Verbal Boundaries

Avoid inappropriate language with students, such as shouting, insults, displays of temper, racially or sexually charged language, or cursing. Even if students talk to you in these ways, resist the urge to match their tone or words. Instead, respond in a calm, but authoritative voice. As an [article](#) by the National Education Association states, “Your voice of greater presence

and a different tone (can help) create a little distance between you and your students.”

Physical Boundaries

What constitutes appropriate physical boundaries between students and adults? Consider these guidelines from the [“Teach, But Don’t Touch”](#) NEA brochure for school employees:

- Always maintain a professional demeanor and distance.
- No flirting, teasing or joking about sex, even if a student flirts, asks a direct question or initiates physical contact. Respond with a firm, “no,” and passive body language – arms at your side or crossed in front, for example.
- Never be alone with a student. Since this may be unavoidable with the last student on the bus, be sure to stay in your seat or in plain sight.
- If a young child is crying and needs comfort, an occasional hug is OK. However, it is best to avoid physical contact. Try kneeling down to their level, and talking in a reassuring way. A sympathetic look and quick squeeze of the hand might be all it takes to calm them.
- Inappropriate touch always includes kissing, hair stroking, tickling, frontal hugs, or pats on the bottom. If you want to reward good behavior, try a “high-five” instead.




- Avoid physical force to enforce discipline. Instead, report incidents to your supervisor.

Relationship Boundaries

Keep your private life private. Having students over or visiting their families, attending their sports or music events, for example, could be crossing a boundary. This may be unavoidable, especially in small towns where you see students at public or school events. You may even coach a student’s soccer team! No matter what the setting, keep the lines of division clear.



Avoid communicating with students via social media suggests another [NEA article](#). That includes texting, Twitter, or Facebook. In fact, many states are debating the legality of such contact.

Just as you protect your students with your safe driving habits and safe loading and unloading practices, protect them – and yourself from accusations of inappropriate behavior – with appropriate verbal, physical and relationship boundaries every time you are around students. 



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