Managing Student Behaviour on School Buses

Useful Tips

The ideas following have been adapted for your use from a website which has numerous ideas for dealing with students’ behaviour in school settings. The ideas below are ones which transfer quite well to your situation on your buses and are worth considering as yet another strategy you may wish to use.

The website is:

More about questioning students – the “What” questioning idea

Questioning students about their behaviour opens up the opportunity for communication between yourself and the student/s, and opens up a more positive opportunity for students to learn from the situation rather than telling them what to do.

“What” questions encourage students to be more precise about what has occurred and avoids making personal judgemental statements. For example questions such as the following place the responsibility onto the student to realise what they have done inappropriately, and to reflect upon how they may react to future incidents:

- What is your understanding of what happened?
- What are/could be the consequences?
- What would you do?
- What other possibilities exist?
- What are some other ways you could approach this issue?

The above questions also:

- encourage looking at positive ways of doing something about an issue
- develops a more positive relationship between yourself and the student/s
- supports students (and yourself) in recognising that there is often more than one way to solve a problem
- allows the student to take responsibility to solve the current and future problems, and
- removes the onus from you believing that you have to ‘solve all of the problems’ on your bus.

Avoid getting into power struggles

Do you have issues with students where they refuse to stop their behaviour when you have picked them up on it and in fact once you have, they increase the level of their misbehaviour?

It’s then very tempting for you to show your annoyance, often through the raising of your voice, then the student raises the ante, and before too long you find yourself in a power struggle between yourself and the student. Also at this stage you may even have other students entering the fray and before you know it a ‘verbal hell’ breaks loose. What can you do?
The easiest piece of advice to give is to avoid putting yourself in the above situation as no one wins. Seek another solution by:

- recognising that student's need to feel powerful (as we all do)
- involve them in making decisions about what has to occur (use your ‘what’ questions)
- provide responsibilities for the student/s
- use an “I message”, for example, ‘I’m hearing offensive language. Would you be considerate enough to restate you opinion in more polite terms, thank you?’

**Some more on the ‘I’ messages**

If we want students to be less confrontational and more cooperative then the way you use language can help you. For instance if you were to say, “You weren’t listening. You’re going to get into trouble.” The chances are you will then have the student challenging what you meant by that and before to long you will get into a slanging match with each other.

To avoid such an episode saying something like: “On the bus I want my students to listen closely so that they can learn important things which will enable them to enjoy their ride to school/home.” You have got your message across which is inclusive of all students on the bus, but have made it clear that the student you are talking to realises that they have a responsibility to listen. You are not necessarily accusing or finger pointing the student, nor will you be forcing the student to be defensive and making excuses, but rather focuses in on what you want them to learn.

An ’I’ statement states what you would like to see done, or how you feel or what you need.

Don’t despair if the above doesn’t work straight away as it takes practice, as well as educating the students on how you prefer to deal with them on your bus. Your modelling of how you speak to them, and indicate to them what is acceptable and not acceptable to you, starts to be taken on board by the students, over time.

**Giving information**

Often in giving information to students we tell them what we want but not the why. Most of us like to know why we have to do things or be given a purpose to what’s been asked.

- make statements short and non-judgmental
- use statements as gentle reminders before being more direct.

For example:

- ‘Folks, lots of paper strewn around the bus. We need a clean up and I’d appreciate your help, thank you.’ or
- ‘The bus is messy. I expect it to be different in 30 seconds.’

**Brief talk**

Quite often when talking to students about their behaviour, adults have a tendency to lecture at them and from the student’s point of view go on and on and on. Students invariably tune out and so your message/s to them is lost. It’s no different to us who tend to tune out when somebody goes on in a lecturing or nagging way. We don’t like it and nor do students.

Keep corrective messages short and simple.

Instead of: ‘Fiona, you’re leaving the bus and chatting to your friend and you haven’t even bothered to pick up your bag which is in the middle of the aisle, where you know it should not be. How many times have I told you about that and how many more times will I need to tell you? Somebody will fall over it and injure themselves. Please pick it up before that happens.’
Try: ‘Fiona. Your schoolbag.’

This technique avoids:

- nagging
- causing
- embarrassment
- negative self image
- retaliation from students
- tuning out and not listening to the message.

Short statements motivate students to:

- think about the limited information
- identify the problem
- devise a solution
- exercise their own initiative and resolve the problem.

**Arguing with a kid is like wrestling with a pig. You both get dirty, and the pig loves it!**

This title comes from the web site of Missouri University in the USA and contains items and ideas of interest to bus drivers in managing student behaviour through proactive approaches.

The site address is: http://www.missouri.edu/~spedtl/MAPTWorkshop.html

The site points out that there are often no easy answers or quick fixes to some of the problems you deal with on your buses; however one way of ensuring a proactive approach is to involve others, particularly school personnel and parents, and of course the student/s involved.

Some suggestions for dealing with provocative or agitating behaviour are:

- where possible speak privately to the student
- speak calmly and respectfully (you model what you’re asking of the student)
- identify the problem
- ask the student to take care of the problem
- present options and expected behaviour as a choice or decision to be made by the student, in consultation with you
- ask the student to select an option
- acknowledge their cooperation
- if the problem escalates, withdraw informing the student you’ll return to the issues when calmness prevails – and don’t forget to do so, or the student will see that you are not serious about resolving the issue
- to deal with the initial behaviour is a powerful way of preventing the problem escalating, and
- remember your response to a problem behaviour plays a significant role in controlling the situation.

To be proactive try:

- continual supervision so that students are aware that you are observing them
  - use visual scanning to create ‘with-it-ness’ -
  - scan students as they get on and off the bus

- anticipate and think ahead
• use your past experiences to anticipate potential problems, for example, students at particular stops, last day of term/semester, sports days, rainy/windy weather

• solving persistent problems
  • gather information
  • establish quick and timely responses
  • manage low-level problems by catching them early.

The 80/15/5 rule

Any one technique/strategy for managing behaviour works great with 80 per cent of students.

• Somewhat with 15 per cent of students.
• And not at all with 5 per cent of the students.

Therefore you need many behaviour management tools, not just one. Avoid doing anything you wouldn’t want done to yourself.

School and bus operator partnerships - Working together on managing student behaviour on school buses

There are many benefits to establishing partnerships between schools and bus operators. Collaboration provides a united front to both parents and students about what student behaviour is expected when travelling on school buses. By working together inappropriate behaviour on buses can be ‘nipped in the bud’.

Here are some tips a bus company manager/operator may use in order to set up a partnership with schools.

To develop a partnership:

• Approach the principal or deputy principal to negotiate a partnership to deal with behaviour issues on the school buses.

• Leave a copy of your company’s rules for students travelling on school buses with the principal/deputy principal.

• Offer to co-write a set of rules with the school or with a small group of teachers, parents and students.

• Meet regularly with your conveyance committee/s.

• Offer to write a monthly note in the school newsletter about appropriate school bus behaviour.

• Ask to speak at a school staff meeting about the behaviour you expect on the buses – both on regular bus runs and excursions.

• Ask schools for their behaviour management plan.

• Mention, and show schools, the Code of Conduct for Children travelling on buses.

• Ask the principal/deputy principal to address your drivers on the school’s behaviour management plan.

• Develop mutually agreed upon procedures and processes for dealing with issues which arise.
Resolve behaviour issues arising on buses jointly – a problem shared is a problem halved.

Deal with parent complaints jointly. The bus company and school must demonstrate consistency in dealing with behaviour issues. Consistent responses also signal to students, and parents, that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated.

At the school suggest the allocation of a senior administration person (for example deputy principal) to:

1. Be responsible for school transport to give the behaviour on buses a high status within the school’s administration structure.

2. Liaise with bus companies – medium to large bus companies may have a school/parent liaison person.

3. Inform teachers, parents and students of what behaviour is expected on buses and what the consequences for inappropriate behaviour are.

Keeping parents in the know - Appropriate student’s behaviour on buses

Parents may not know what behaviour is expected of students on your bus/es. It is up to you to inform them regularly (once a term/semester). Also encourage the students to tell their parents what is expected.

Some of the following are used by school bus companies and may be useful to you:

- Send home a flyer outlining your rules for travelling on buses and attach a copy of the Code of Conduct for school bus travel: A guide for parents and students brochure (available from Queensland Transport).

- Attach a welcoming letter, with a copy of the above brochure, to the Bus Travel Assistance Application form.

- Approach the school’s Parents & Citizens Association to explain your company’s expectations of students’ behaviour on buses, and the consequences for inappropriate behaviour. Outline the rules for travelling on school buses, the reasons for them, and the responsibilities of parents, students, the school and the bus company.

- If you believe the student's behaviour is of concern, contact both the school and parents/guardians. Inform them of your concerns and seek their support in resolving the situation.

- Use a positive approach to inform parents of problems with their child’s behaviour. Explain that the situation requires the parents, the student, possibly the school and driver to work together towards a mutually agreed upon solution.

- Log in your diary every occasion a student has required a talk from you regarding their behaviour. You may need this later to include in a letter to parents or to use at a meeting with parents and the student.

- On occasions you may experience aggressive and persistent parents who believe their child has been wrongly accused of inappropriate behaviour on the bus. It is crucial that you inform them of the facts as you know them. Use any
notes you’ve taken on the behaviour, your response to the behaviour and actions
taken.

- Avoid the discussion ending up in a ‘shouting match’. If this does occur, suggest
another meeting time with the company manager/school bus supervisor and/or
school representative present, in order to work through the issues to a
satisfactory outcome for all concerned.

- Be prepared to listen to parents’ point of view, avoid dismissing their position as
being wrong or biased in favour of their child. A useful strategy is to write down
each of the issues or points they dispute and then address each in turn with the
facts as you understand them.

Praise positive behaviour

The students are misbehaving and it seems as though it’s hopeless for you to do anything. All
too often we raise issues of poor behaviour with students and focus on the negatives.
Reverse the focus and make mention of positive behaviour.

You notice one student who was not misbehaving. You say to that student, ‘I appreciate the
fact that way you are behaving so well Jane.’

It may just cause a chain reaction where misbehaving students stop what they are doing and
behave the way you expect them to.

Praise often, not just the once.

The 10 demandments of behaviour management

1. Always treat students with respect and preserve their dignity.
2. Always do what is in the student’s best interests.
3. Seek solutions, not blame.
5. Use the least intrusive intervention possible.
6. Connect with the students.
7. Instil hope for a successful solution.
8. Never do anything disrespectful, illegal, immoral, ineffective, that you wouldn’t
want done to you.
9. Never give up on a student – believe in them changing for the better.
10. Catch students being good … a lot.

Asking questions about behaviour - Adapted from William Glasser

1. If a problem occurs, ask ‘What are you doing?’ – this may help the student to recognise
the behaviour’s existence, own it, and prepare to stop it. When you get an answer that states
the actual behaviour, say something like, “Please stop it!” If the student tries to distract you
from the issue, ask ‘What rule have you broken?’ until the student describes the behaviour
or the rule.

2. Upon receiving an accurate description, ask ‘What should you be doing?’ Obtain an
accurate description of expected behaviour. This practice helps the student to realise that
he/she is displaying inappropriate behaviour and causes him/her to reflect on expectations.

3. If the above fails, repeat ‘What rule have you broken?’, and then ‘We have to work this
out. What kind of plan can you make to follow the rules?’ The plan must be positive
action plan (a description of the behaviour to be displayed) rather than a lack of action. The
student must tell you what he/she will do in same/similar situations. Ask ‘**What can you do to fix the problem?**’ and/or ‘**What would you do differently next time?**’

4. If the student disrupts again, isolate him/her and if possible move them down to the front of the bus.

5. If the above doesn’t work, a suspension from the bus may be implemented (refer to **Code of Conduct for Children travelling on buses**). Perhaps say something like, ‘**Things are not working out for you here. You and I have tried to sort out this problem but it’s time to talk with some other people (guardian, school principal, bus company manager, conveyance committee).**’

6. The length of the suspension may vary as a result of discussions held and the severity of the behaviour.

**Effective (and gentle) ways to criticise constructively**

Instead of dwelling on what a student may have done wrong in terms of their behaviour on the bus, mention to them what they have accomplished and then point out what still needs to be done - criticism is most effective when it is constructive.

Some positive ways to make it happen:

- **Use ‘I’ statements.** ‘You never get to the bus stop on time,’ try, ‘I’d like you to get to the stop on time tomorrow.’ The latter emphasises the **behaviour** you want to change, without blame or judgement.

- **Timing counts.** The more immediate your response the better, even if there’s limited time for a long description. Short, firm (not yelled) reprimands delivered right away are most effective. If you don’t say something students will assume that their inappropriate behaviour is fine.

- **Deal with one behaviour trait at a time.** Often we overwhelm students by attempting to correct too many behaviours. Instead, think: ‘**What’s the one thing (behaviour) if tuned up would make this student happier and better behaved?**’

- **Do it eye to eye.** When you offer criticism, make eye contact with the student. Ask them to repeat what you have said: If the student can put it into their own words, you’re going to be much more successful because they have really heard what you’re concerned about.

- **Keep your cool.** Criticism works best when it’s delivered calmly and objectively. That means watching your tone of voice and your body language. Sneering, smirking, or sarcasm won’t help your cause at all.

- **Strive for a healthy balance.** Don’t allow criticism to become the norm. Some experts suggest a ratio of five times positive interactions for every critical interaction.

Certainly students require all the praise they can get – but they also require guidance and instruction, presented in ways that will enhance their strengths. It can be tricky, but by following some of the above few principles we can provide them with what they need to behave appropriately on the bus.

The following has come from drivers around Queensland who have successfully used the ideas listed below:

- Placing suitable books and magazines in a rack at the front of the bus so students can choose something to read.
• If there is a video machine on the bus showing a G-rated video – particularly useful for students who travel a long distance.

• Placing cheap game-boy type games available in a storage bin at the front of the bus for students to select from.

• Once a full load of students are on board, the driver takes a minute to walk up the aisle saying good morning to everyone.

• Warning cards - the driver flashes a yellow card when behaviour or noise is not appropriate and if necessary calls out a students’ name if they are the offender. A red card displayed by the driver indicates a warning and the offending student/s names are entered into a warning book.

Driver keeps a point system on each child where points (on a scale of one to three) are allocated to students who behave appropriately. At the end of the week/fortnight the child with the most points receives a prize/reward from the driver. Over the year drivers ensure that all students receive a gift.