

Start the school year with school bus safety  
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For thousands of students in Oconee County, the first day of school will begin and end with a trip on the school bus. While this mode of transportation is convenient and practical, there are significant safety issues to be considered.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 149 school-aged pedestrians (under age 19) have died in school-transportation related accidents since 1998. Of those, 69% were the result of school bus crashes. Additionally, 47% of those killed were between the ages of 5 and 7.

For many children, riding the bus is a rite of passage that signals a year full of promise and increased independence. By following a few safety precautions, parents can ensure that their children are safe while traveling.

First, make sure that children arrive to the bus stop five minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive and stand at least six giant steps (6 feet) from the curb. Check your child's clothing for loose drawstrings and shorten backpack straps. Long strings can get caught on handrails and in bus doors.

Teach your child to get on and off the bus safely:

Wait until the bus stops and the driver says it is safe before loading. When crossing the street in front of a bus, walk on the side of the road until they are 10 giant steps (or 10 feet) in front before they cross. Also, if something is dropped near the bus, make sure you alert the driver because he or she may not be able to see you or your child on the ground. Finally, teach your children when getting off the bus to look both left and right to make traffic is stopped.

In many cases, other motorists pose the greatest threat to bus riders. As drivers, we have a responsibility to operate our cars safely around school busses. When a school bus is stopped, with red lights flashing and an extended stop sign, drivers are required to stop – from either direction. The lights and sign are an indication that children are entering or exiting a school bus. Never pass a school bus until these safety lights are turned off. This is not only illegal, but can also have tragic results.

Following these tips will help ensure that children are getting to and from school safely.

*For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.*