

Autism & School Bus Safety



For many children with autism, riding the school bus can be the most challenging part of the day. Transitions, sensory input, and communication demands can make rides stressful. Use these S.A.F.E. B.U.S.E.S. tips to help ensure calm, comfort, and safety.

S — Start with Preparation

Build familiarity before the first ride. Visit the bus and practice boarding/exiting, and meet the driver and aides. Review photos or short videos of the routine. Practice waiting safely at the bus stop with adult supervision.

A — Add Predictable Routines

Consistency reduces anxiety and increases cooperation. Use visual schedules or social stories, and practice bus rules (assigned seat, first on/last off). Review expectations daily before school.

F — Focus on Safety Skills

Teach simple, repeatable rules, like staying seated, using seatbelt or harness if available, keeping hands, feet, and objects inside the bus, and following the driver and aide's directions.

E — Ease Sensory Needs

Small supports can make a big difference, such as headphones or ear defenders, assigned or preferred seating, sunglasses or hats, and giving next steps before stops and arrival.

B — Build Communication Supports

Use visual cues (sit, wait, quiet, stop) and encourage gestures, pointing, or AAC if needed. Ensure bus staff understands your child's communication style.

U — Understand Your Child's Rights

Strong advocacy helps ensure safety and respectful treatment. You can request accommodations and supports, and ask about staff training and supervision. Ensure plans are shared with transportation staff.

S — Secure Supports in IEP/504

Transportation accommodations should be clearly written. Include transportation supports in the IEP/504 and share behavior and communication plans with bus staff. Request assigned seating, aides, and video monitoring.

E — Evaluate Warning Signs

Check in daily and watch for changes. Red flags include: fear or refusal of the bus; unexplained injuries or lost items; sudden emotional or behavioral changes after school; regression or increased anxiety around transportation.

S — Speak Up & Report Concerns

Trust your instincts and act quickly. Document observations and dates, and report concerns to school and transportation staff immediately. Request video footage, as well as a meeting and written follow-up. Escalate concerns if needed until safety is addressed.

