

Transporting Students with Emotional Disabilities

Reference Guide and Test

A Product of Video Communications



INTRODUCTION

I) School bus drivers realize that their most important priority is the safety of the students they are transporting. But there are other equally important priorities. One of those is how to deal with and recognize disruptive student behavior on the school bus. This becomes even a more daunting task when dealing with students who have emotional or mental disabilities. Students with these types of disabilities require much more patience and effort to have a positive bus riding experience.

II) The video covers many of the issues that special needs drivers face every school day. The focus of the program is to provide special needs drivers with tools that can be used to ensure student safety. The video paints a clear picture of how to familiarize yourself with a variety of disabilities, as well as intervening with students when it becomes necessary to do so. The video is divided into the following sections.

Part 1 Introduction: Transporting Students with Emotional Disabilities

Part 2 Communication with Students, Parents and the School Team

Part 3 Interventions and Additional Issues

PART 1:

INTRODUCTION: TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES

1) Special needs bus drivers are going to face a variety of mental disabilities. These include, but are not limited to: *Autism, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Emotional Disturbance, Epilepsy and more*. It is important to take the time to find out about the different types of disabilities of the students that you are transporting. It's also important to understand that the needs of one student may be the polar opposite of the needs of another student. **The point being:** you will need to understand each student's needs.

2) To list and cover all of the different types of disabilities would be impractical. So instead of looking at it as addressing different types of disabilities, think of it as addressing different types of student needs. **Each student on the bus has a different set of needs. That is the first and most important thing to realize.**

3) ***The second most important thing to realize*** is that it takes a special blend of skill, empathy and patience to transport students with special needs. Think about how the special needs student looks at their driver. The driver creates a routine that the students can follow every day. This gives the students a high level of comfort. They can rely on their driver.

4) In the video, we show an example of the needs of an autistic student who is used to a very structured routine. She becomes frightened and angered when she realizes that another student is sitting in her seat. Without being able to communicate her needs, the distraught student starts to become progressively agitated. Noises, movements and other distractions are amplified and the student simply melts down. This example demonstrates the importance of being acutely aware of the needs of the students you are transporting.

5) Children with disabilities generally have specific “**triggers**” such as: words, images, sounds or other outside distractions that signal danger or disruption to their feelings of safety and security. These are specific to each child.

6) The third issue for special needs drivers is how they adapt to their students. As a special needs bus driver, you must understand that no two days will ever be the same. No matter how much structure and routine are emphasized, there is always the possibility that unforeseen changes will occur.

CHANGE VS. CONSISTENCY?

7) Special needs students crave routine and consistency. However, the bus driver needs to recognize that daily change in the lives of these students is a fact. It will happen. So the bus driver will need to balance these 2 issues.

8) ***There is one more thing to keep in mind.*** And that is to remember that many of these students do not want to be classified as special needs students. Instead, they want to be classified as regular ed students.

9) Being a special needs driver is not simply getting in the bus and driving. The students rely on you and the consistency you provide.

Part 2:
**COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS,
PARENTS AND THE SCHOOL TEAM**

1) Special needs bus drivers are required to perform many tasks during the course of a day. Some students have physical disabilities that require the driver to do physical work. But the most difficult part about being a special needs driver isn't physical, it's dealing effectively with the changing patterns of behavior of the special needs students.

2) **Special needs students thrive on routine and familiarity.** How to understand each student's needs is just the starting point. And the steps it takes to understand the needs of students or how to intervene with them is the key. This is done through communication.

3) **Healthy communication** with these students is critical. However, it is not only the students that need to be communicated with, but also their parents, their teachers and in many cases the school team.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

4) **A meet and greet is a good way to start the school year.** And don't forget, communication with parents is a critical element in the communication process. Also, take into consideration that many of the special needs students spend most of their time at home. So parents have already gone through a trial and error period to better understand their child's needs.

5) In the video, we give an example of a meet and greet with a special needs bus driver and the parent of a special needs student. We introduce the importance of establishing communication and understanding the student's needs.

6) The parent supplied the driver with a series of instructions. The driver can use this information to ensure the chances of a care free ride to school and home. Also, keep in mind that the communication between the driver and parent should be an ongoing process. Here is a critical tip in working with special needs students that should never be forgotten. **Special needs students behavior can change so if the driver can get a heads up from a**

parent, this information can turn out to be vital information.

7) Communication throughout the school year with parents is critical. A change that has happened in the student's home life is a change in their routine. A change in routine at home can be translated to disruptive behavior on the school bus.

8) Parents of the student will be the first to let you know about any changes at home. Such changes can include:

- a) A death in the family
- b) a relative moving in or out of the house
- c) change in the home routine and much more

9) Write up issues such as these when they come up. **It's important to keep notes on these issues. Also, when applicable, pass this information on to substitute drivers.**

10) Try to establish a good relationship with parents. By doing so, you can confidently exchange ideas with parents and ultimately gain the parents trust by showing that you care about their child's needs. Also, apply these same communications principles, when possible to the student's teachers. They too play a major role in understanding the behavior of the special needs student.

COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS

11) In the video, we show an interview with a Special Needs teacher. She explains that routine and structure are the most important and critical parts when transporting special needs students. She also explains that communication between herself and bus drivers are extremely important.

12) Special needs teachers are specifically trained to deal with several different types of behavioral conditions. You can learn a great deal from them. Try to stay in close communication with teachers.

13) Special needs teachers are present during the IEP. Teachers can help provide the bus driver with helpful information about the behavioral condition of their students. However, also remember, communicating directly with the students on your bus is one of the most

effective ways to learn about each student's behavioral patterns.

COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

14) Communicating with special needs students requires nonstop attention. These students have routines that make them feel comfortable. You can get valuable information from parents and teachers. However, you are going to be the one driving the bus and required to communicate with these students.

15) During the video, we return to the scene of the autistic girl who experienced the trauma of losing her seat to another student. We give two examples of how the driver can handle the situation. First, with negative reinforcement, then followed by positive reinforcement. And the difference between the two is evident. It is important to understand that **the way you communicate with students that exhibit emotional or behavioral disabilities is extremely critical.**

16) *In the negative example*, the driver loses her cool and begins to argue with the student. This makes the situation much more volatile, not only for the student who 'melted down' but also for the other students riding the bus. It is not the way she should have handled the incident.

17) *In the positive example*, the driver calmly communicates with both the student who 'melted down' as well as the the student who was asked to leave his seat. This incident did not cause a disruption because the school bus driver used positive intervention. The outcome became a win-win situation because the driver maintained a calm tone of voice and used basic communication techniques. Emphasizing positive language instead of negative words is a very valuable way to get the result you are looking for.

18) Now, here are some basic ideas and guidelines to follow when communicating with special needs students. From the very first moment that a special needs students enters your bus, the bus driver will must do their best to each students realize two things:

- a) One - you care about their needs and want to be there to help.
- b) Two - each must understand that you are in charge of the bus.

19) These guidelines can signal to students that the bus driver is in charge and that the driver cares about the needs of their students. Also, bus drivers always have to keep in mind that they must always maintain a structured atmosphere on their bus.

20) Probably the most important aspect of communicating with students who have emotional or behavioral disabilities is to have patience. Patience when talking to the student. Patience when a student "melts down." Patience when communicating with parents or members of the school team.

21) Sometimes "*special needs*" are actually "*unexpected needs*" that may arise. When this happens, adaptability by the bus driver becomes the critical equation.

22) Since there are so many different types of disabilities as well as different forms of communication, it is important to create a system of communication that works for each individual student. *When communicating with students with behavioral or emotional disabilities, it's important to use every means possible to communicate with each student.* This also means the bus driver must learn to receive the message the student is trying to convey. **Listening to your students needs. It's a pivotal part of communication.**

23) **There are also non verbal cues**, such as facial expression, gesture and body language. These are some of the more obvious examples of non-verbal communication. They are important because student with emotional disabilities pick up on these non verbal cues. This is an important consideration when communicating with special needs students.

24) There are several different communication techniques that can be applied to certain students and their disabilities. The important thing to note here is that **by using a combination of different communication cues and techniques, you can greatly increase the effectiveness of the message you are trying to get across.** In that way the listener will have more cues to help them understand your message.

Part 3:
INTERVENTION TECHNIQUES
AND ADDITIONAL ISSUES

1) In the video, a student is shown getting out of his seat and briskly moving up and down the aisle of the bus while it is in motion. The driver tells the student tries to return to his sea. The student refuses to listen to the driver's instructions. The driver then decides that the student is enough of a distraction that she will have to find a safe area to pull the bus over and deal with the situation.

2) To intervene with a special needs student, you must apply the communication techniques that have been demonstrated during the course of the video. Obviously, the bus driver had to be flexible in order to adapt to the student's disruptive behavior. She also made sure to take charge of the situation.

3) In the video, you can notice the driver using her hands in addition to words, when communicating with the student. This is something that the student is used to seeing and the driver incorporates this technique into her part of the communication process.

Redirecting Techniques

4) The driver also uses another intervention technique. She tries to redirect the student's attention and by doing this she increases her chance to gain control of the situation and make the ride home safer for all of students.

5) Redirecting the attention of students is a valuable intervention technique. Often, a special needs student's mental process gets over stimulated and they need something that can "**center**" or "**ground**" them. So when communication does not completely succeed, a bus driver can use redirecting the student's attention as a means to calm them down.

Maintain Consistency During Communication

6) Bus drivers are human and sometimes difficult situations can become overwhelming, so the bus driver should never "lose their cool. And remember, consistency in

communication and consistency in tone of voice during the communication process is extremely important. These students need to know that the bus driver is in control of the bus. They also need to know that they can count on the bus driver to help them.

Choose Your Battles

7) When intervening and setting a routine for students, it is important to remember to choose your battles wisely. The video gives a poignant example of this when a student takes her shoes off while riding the bus. This results in a confrontation with the driver.

In the first example, we illustrate how fast the situation can escalate when a driver loses her cool and does not communicate properly with the student. The bus driver begins to get frustrated and the driver's tone of voice begins to change. This only makes the student anxious. The situation starts spiraling out of control. In other words the battle has been lost.

8) The video then gives a positive example to an alternative way of dealing with the situation. And as the video shows, there is a major difference in the outcome. The moral of the example is to choose your battles wisely. The student simply wanted her shoes off. She is used to not wearing shoes on the bus. This is a new bus and a new routine for her. So why try to get in an argument. It hurts no one else on the bus that the her shoes are off. It will simply make this drivers route easier now that the student is comfortable and set in her routine.

Go The Extra Mile

9) As a special needs bus driver, your duties go past that of the typical school bus driver. Asking students how their day went or what they learned in school that day means a lot to them. A good special needs driver wants to be involved in the student's educational process. An effective special needs driver does special things for the students. This gives students positive reenforcement. We give an example of this in the video during an interview when one bus driver states how he takes students out on their birthdays and even attends their graduations.

CLOSING

Special needs bus drivers take their jobs seriously. But not so seriously that they cannot engage with students and provide a fun and safe trip to school or home. Remember that the students who ride your bus depend on you. Take the time to go the extra mile. Remember to establish a relationship with parents. Remember to communicate with students and teachers. Take the time to use online resources and exchange ideas with others. This job takes plenty of patience, communication, empathy and flexibility. Keep doing a great job.

TEST QUESTIONS

1) It is more important to understand a student's disability than their needs.

TRUE or FALSE

2) This is something that special needs students consistently thrive on.

a) routine

b) candy

c) freedom

d) None of the above

3) Special needs students want to be treated as equals to regular ed. students.

TRUE or FALSE

4) The hardest part of being a special needs bus driver is tying down wheelchairs.

TRUE or FALSE

5) It is okay to raise your voice to make sure that the student understands that your point is heard.

TRUE or FALSE

6) Parents can pass along critical information to the bus driver such as:

a) A death in the family

b) a relative moving in or out of the house

c) change in the home routine

d) all of the above

7) You should give a student who is being disruptive a special prize to calm them down and redirect their attention.

TRUE or FALSE

8) Many special needs students use comfort items to give them a sense of security.

TRUE or FALSE

9) Once you speak with a parent or teacher, it is unimportant to speak with them again since you have already gained all the information you need.

TRUE or FALSE

10) Please write YOUR own opinion of what makes a good special needs bus driver.

ANSWER KEY

1) FALSE

2) a

3) TRUE

4) FALSE

5) FALSE

6) d

7) FALSE

8) TRUE

9) FALSE

10) Any answer will suffice and is left up to the judgment of the trainer or supervisor.