

8 Tips for Back to School Traffic Safety

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As September approaches and children return to school in droves, we all have a responsibility to be a little more watchful on the roads. This is particularly important at times of day when children are more likely to be outside of the school - including when school begins, lunchtime and after school.

In 2017, the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) found that children between 5 and 14 - that is, school-aged children are the most at-risk pedestrian group. Over the five years prior to the report, an average of 30 children under 14 were killed and 2,412 injured each year.

Driving defensively and observing the rules helps keep everyone safe and sound. Distracted driving is a particular concern around school zones, and you can expect police to be vigilant in those areas as school resumes.

In addition, driving infractions committed in a school zone can substantially increase your [car insurance](#) rates. Offenses such as improperly passing a school bus, failure to obey a school crossing sign or speeding/passing in a school zone are considered major offences. These convictions, depending on your insurance company, can increase your insurance premiums by 15% or more for a first offence and 25% or more for subsequent offences.

Here are eight important safety rules to keep in mind when driving on or around school property this fall.

1. Always stop for a school bus when the lights are flashing

In Ontario alone, nearly a million children travel by school bus every day.

Children have a limited sense of danger and are often excited and energetic

when getting on or off a school bus. Watch out for children who may dart out from between stopped school buses or parked cars. Don't obstruct a school bus loading zones and be patient as children get on and off the bus.

Motorists travelling in both directions are required to stop for a school bus when its lights are flashing and the stop arm is out. Failing to stop for a school bus carries with it a fine of up to \$2,000 and six demerit points.

2. Observe the posted speed limits

It's important to slow down as you approach a school zone and watch for children who may run out into harm's way. Posted speed limits in school zones are typically either 30km/hr or 40km/hr. Travelling at a slower speed gives drivers time to stop safely in case there are children crossing the road unexpectedly. Playground zones have the same speed limits and are in effect from dawn until dusk each day.

Children may be out and about at various times throughout the day for recess, lunch time or field trips so you need to be careful when driving in school zones.

3. Use designated stopping areas only

Respect your school's posted pick up and drop off areas to avoid creating unnecessary traffic congestion and unsafe conditions. This includes respecting "No Parking" and "No Stopping" zones.

By parking or stopping illegally you will create unsafe conditions for those around you, impacting visibility, traffic flow and compromising safe zones designed into road planning networks. It is not just inconvenient to other road users, it is dangerous.

4. Obey the crossing guard at all times

Whether you think they are right or not, obey crossing guards at all times. Children expect that crossing guards will only allow them to cross if the situation is safe, so disregarding a crossing guard's instructions can have serious consequences.

5. Do not pass other vehicles in a school zone

This is a dangerous practice that is prohibited in school zones. When passing other vehicles, you may be travelling quickly and your overall visibility is reduced. Children crossing the street won't expect you to be passing and won't be prepared for your car being in a different lane than usual.

Similarly, you should not perform a U-turn or three-point turn, or even driving in reverse in a school zone if you can avoid it. Any sort of unpredictable driving manoeuvre may catch children off guard and cause or contribute to an accident.

6. Avoid driving into the school parking lot

School parking lots tend to be very congested, especially at designated school pick up and drop off times. Increased traffic means an increased likelihood of accidents. It's safer for everyone if you park across the street and use the cross walk to get to school property.

7. Expect the unexpected

Children are unpredictable and can run out into traffic at any time. Watch carefully as you approach a school zone and be prepared for children to step onto the road unexpectedly.

8. Teach your children the rules of traffic safety and school bus etiquette

You can help keep your children safe by teaching them the rules of the road. Children should stay well away from any streets and the school parking lot while they are at school. Crossing the street only at designated cross walks, under the supervision of an adult (ideally a cross guard), is key to reduce the likelihood that your child might be hit. Be a good role model for your children by following the same rules that you would like them to follow. This helps reinforce the importance of safety rules in your son or daughter's mind.

If your child takes the school bus, teach them to respect the school bus driver. They should remain seated at all times while on the bus and refrain from distracting conduct, such as throwing things or yelling. They should line up for the school bus at least five steps back from the road in a single file line to wait for the bus and remain there until the bus has come to a complete stop and the doors are open before moving forward. When dismounting the bus, children should always walk (rather than run) and be careful if they need to cross the street. They should never cross between parked cars.

Children are our most precious resource and keeping them safe is a priority that we can all agree on. By reinforcing good safety habits among ourselves and our children, we can help to keep them safe and sound throughout the school year. Following the basic rules for traffic safety in school zones will not only keep children safe, but has a number of added benefits.