

# Walking school bus guide

## Walk the route yourself first

All Walking School Bus drivers should walk the route together first, identifying the safest crossing points and any hazards along the way. Ask your Police School Community Officer to walk the route with you and do some road safety education in your junior classes before you get underway.

## Hazards

- Everyone needs to be on the lookout for “sneaky driveways” – driveways from which a reversing driver does not have a clear view of pedestrians on the footpath.
- Remind children not to pat dogs they encounter along the way. Ask your school to book the Council’s Animal Control Team’s Dog Safety Education Programme.
- High visibility clothing makes children more visible to motorists. Child-size fluorescent bibs are an option.



## Ratio of drivers to children

This can vary depending on the road environment and the age of the children. One adult to six children is about right – but depending on how quiet and safe your route is, the number of children can increase. Older children can help out, but do not have the maturity or authority to be a Walking School Bus driver.

## Adult roles

- Each bus needs a coordinator to liaise between the school and the parent volunteers, and to act as a contact person in emergencies (i.e. a designated driver falling sick).
- The drivers make sure the children walk to and from school safely along the determined route. Except for small buses, having one driver at the front of the bus and another at the back is ideal.

## Walking on the bus

- Have the youngest, slowest children at the front of the bus, setting the pace. Don’t allow other children to get ahead or straggle behind.
- Walk on the pavement away from the kerb.
- Toys like balls can be distracting and cause safety issues – leave them at home.
- If you’re not at a pedestrian crossing but a courteous driver stops to let you cross the road, it is safer to wait and wave the stopped vehicle on.
- Cross away from parked cars. Gather the children around you away from the kerb until it is safe to cross. Always cross any street in one group.



- Identify safe Walking School Bus stops (collection and drop-off points) for children joining the bus along the route. These children should be accompanied by their parents to this point – they are responsible for their child to and from the bus stop. You should not leave your group to help another child across the road.

## Teach safe behaviour

- Children learn by observation. They model their behaviour on what they see adults do, and it’s important that Walking School Bus drivers set a good example.
- Remember that they don’t see the world as adults do – they’re shorter and their eyesight is not fully developed. Teach them what to look for when they look right and left.
- Young children often cannot judge the speed of an approaching vehicle. Encourage children to participate in the decision-making as to when to cross the road, but make sure they understand that you make the final decision.



## Staying enthusiastic

- To avoid volunteer burnout, decide upon a lifespan for the Walking School Bus (e.g. 12 months). This can be extended, but the ongoing need and enthusiasm for the Walking School Bus should be assessed at regular intervals.
- Small rewards can keep enthusiasm alive and reinforce good behaviour. Consider theme days, like a decorated sunhat competition.
- Take the opportunity to observe the ever-changing environment of your route to school. Walking to and from school isn’t just a journey, it should also be an adventure.

## Contingencies

- Share contact details. Each family should be provided with a roster containing the contact details of all the participants. Drivers can have the numbers of the school and their Walking School Bus coordinator among their contacts.
- Have back-up drivers in case of illness, etc. that the coordinator can call upon. This avoids having to contact all the other families to inform them that the bus is cancelled that day, and someone potentially missing the message.
- Make sure the wet weather plan is consistent and that all the families know it. If children have the right wet weather gear it is possible to walk on all but the most stormy days.
- Decide beforehand how disciplinary issues will be handled, to ensure the safety of children and help avoid misunderstandings among parents.

