

Riding the Bus

Introduction

Using a bus is a great option for people who cannot drive, and is something you can teach your child to do, depending on their ability to interact in the community. Depending on where you live, you may have several different ride options for your child.

Fixed-route buses require a user to be able to pay for rides, and use get on and off the bus at the right stop. For people who are unable to use a fixed-route bus due to a disability or a disabling health condition, there are paratransit options that you can look at by calling your public transit department. A person must apply to be able to use **paratransit** buses and rides must be reserved in advance. **Community ride** programs are also an option for people with disabilities, and these are usually rides offered by volunteers in the community.

Riding the Bus

Here are some things to keep in mind when you teach a child to use public transportation.

1. **Safety** – Ensure that your child carries proper identification and information about their diagnosis while riding the bus. You can also give them a list of emergency contacts in case they are lost or need assistance. It may also be a good idea to give your child a GPS tracker, so that you can track where they are in case of an emergency. You should also talk to your child about locating a safe adult in case they need help. You can show them how to recognize a police officer, or someone who works in a store, or a mother with other children. You should practice having them ask for assistance and role play different situations. You should also establish rules, such as never walking away from the bus stop while waiting for a bus, unless they are walking home. Also talk about not taking rides from strangers. You should also make sure your child can safely cross the street to get to the bus stop.
2. **Time your child's trips** – Know the bus schedule and download apps that may track buses so that your child does not have to wait for a long period at the bus stop. You should have your child practice using the app frequently, so that they can use it easily and independently. You can also show them how to recognize bus route changes in the app.
3. **Show your child the route** – Make sure your child knows which bus to get on, and where to get off. You should accompany your child until they know exactly how to do this. Teach your child to ask for help in case the bus takes a different route due to road closures. Point out landmarks that they can use to track their journey. You can show your child the bus route beyond their specific stops, and practice what

to do if they miss their stop. Teach them how to backtrack, or get help if this happens.

4. **Use Visual Aids** – You can use social stories or visual schedules to teach your child about how to ride the bus. You can give them a copy of a visual schedule with specific steps such as “get on the bus, sit down, buckle seatbelt and get off the bus at the right stop.” Teach them to sit as close to the front as possible.
5. **Cashless transactions** – Many public transit organizations offer cashless transaction options. This option eliminates the hassle of carrying change, and having to give and take money. You may need to enroll your child in this option, and give them a card to use for travel. Also, let them know that the card is only for them, and to not give it to anyone else for use.
6. **Talk to the bus driver** – If your child will meet the same bus driver multiple times, you can introduce yourself and your child to the driver and let them know about your child's diagnosis. You can also let them know what to expect from your child in terms of verbal responsiveness or behavior. You can ask the driver to point out your child's bus stop to them and give them additional assistance if required.
7. **Use positive reinforcement** – When traveling on the bus with your child, reinforce expected behaviors with small treats and praise. Show them how to pay for their ride, sit and indicate that they need the bus to stop at the next stop.

Conclusion

Teaching a child to use public transportation is a huge step in getting them to be independent. You may need to try fixed-route buses and/or paratransit transportation options before you can decide on which type of transportation works best for your child. Remember, you should never leave a child to use the bus if you are not confident about their ability to get on and off at the right stop and know where they need to go. We hope you have found this information useful. For more learning modules, go to www.porchlighteducation.org.