



How to establish a school carpool



Yellow buses are synonymous with school. But in some neighborhoods, budget cuts have forced school districts to limit bus service for students. In an effort to transport youngsters to school more efficiently, parents often band together to form carpools. Those who are new to the area or school may not know where to turn to team up with other like-minded parents.

Ridesharing is an effective way to get children to and from school and divide the responsibilities among parents. Carpooling reduces vehicular congestion in and around the school, cuts down on car emissions in the atmosphere and also helps multiple families save time. Furthermore, carpooling can offset fuel costs and cut down on wear and tear on a vehicle for those parents who live far away from their kids' schools.

Choosing carpoolers

Parents who live nearest to you are the most likely choices for carpoolers. Most schools funnel children from specific areas into one school, so look for parents of school-aged youngsters in the immediate vicinity of your home.

Many school communities now have an online presence through social media, and this can make finding people to share carpooling responsibilities with that much easier. Keep in mind that if you are new to the school and/or community, it could take more time to establish yourself as a reliable and safe driver among other parents. Remember, when it comes to the safety of their children, many parents are not quick to let them hop into the car with just anyone. The same principle exists when you are looking for a carpool. You'll want to develop a rela-

tionship with the parents prior to the start of the carpool to ensure you feel comfortable with your child riding along with this person.

Establish a schedule

Carpooling will blend the schedules of a few different families together. It is important to map out a schedule so that all days of the week are covered. There should be a contingency plan should one driver not be able to carpool that day due to illness or other commitments.

Carpooling safety

Even if you are close friends with someone who will be ridesharing, you will want to be certain of their driving skills prior to their driving your kids to school. All parents involved in the carpool should bring their safety concerns and rules to the table to be sure everyone has the same priorities.

The size of vehicles will play a role in carpooling safety. Each child should have ample room to sit and his or her own seat belt. If booster or car seats are still required, the car should fit the seats comfortably so that all passengers have the correct safety equipment. No child should be allowed to ride unsecured, in the front seat under the required age by law or in the rear cargo area of a sport utility vehicle.

Establish a payment arrangement

In most school carpooling situations the amount of fuel used is nominal. However, those who do spend a good deal of money on gas may want to establish a way of sharing the costs associated with the carpool. Taking turns driving the kids to school usually divides the cost fairly. Some parents prefer to give a gift at the end of the school year to the parent who did the bulk of the driving. Donations to the primary driver also can offset any expenses.

Carpooling is a good method of transporting children to school when buses are not available. A carpool reduces the number of cars on the road and also helps conserve time and resources among several different households.

Recognizing cyberbullying

Before social media became so prevalent, instances of bullying were somewhat easy to recognize. However, with a good majority of children now engaged in digital networking and social media, bullying may not end with the ringing of the school bell, and evidence of bullying may not be so readily apparent.

According to Cyberbullying statistics from the iSAFE foundation, more than half of adolescents and teens have been bullied online, and about the same number have engaged in cyberbullying. More than 80 percent of teens use a mobile phone regularly, making it the most popular form of technology and a common medium for repeated cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying takes place through electronic technology and differs from traditional forms of bullying. Cyberbullying can occur via text messaging, blogging, updates to social media sites and/or phone conversations. What makes cyberbullying more difficult to detect and remedy than traditional bullying is that sometimes this type of bullying is veiled in secrecy.

Those who engage in cyberbullying can create aliases and accounts under false names, allowing them to covertly engage in bullying behavior. As a result, tracking down bullies can be challenging. Although cyberbullying is on the rise, there are some things that parents and



Adults should remain diligent in monitoring what kids are doing online. Bullying can take place through digital devices, such as mobile phones.

children can do to help put a stop to such unfortunate instances.

* Parents who feel their child is not emotionally ready for the responsibility of a digital device can hold back on purchasing a smartphone or choose one with very limited features. Some schools set strict limits on phone usage at school, and children who go only from school to home and vice versa may not have the need for an "emergency phone" that can open up a window for trouble.

* Adolescents and teens should feel comfortable talking with their parents without the fear of reprimand. Otherwise, they may hide instances of cyberbullying or not know how to broach sensitive topics like bullying. Parents can engage in conversation with their children often and stress that the doors of communication are always open.

* Teens should be made aware that cyberbullying is

a very real occurrence and is not just other kids "having fun" or "joking." If behavior is repetitive and hurtful, it should be made public and addressed.

* Parents can monitor and limit their children's personal accounts. Some smartphone and tablet applications can be mirrored on the main account, enabling parents to see incoming text or video messages.

* A laptop or desktop computer should be placed in a shared space so that usage can be monitored. Parents can restrict tablet or smartphone usage to public areas.

* When online, children should be advised not to share personal information. Social media sites may be used by bullies to gather sensitive information about a person that can be used against them at a later time. Children should be urged to keep passwords secret and to never give information such as birthdays, phone numbers and addresses to people who aren't close friends. Friend lists should be restricted to only those people students interact with frequently to minimize the chance for bullying or other inappropriate behavior.

* Teens who have been bullied can keep evidence of the bullying and may benefit from talking with a counselor.

Cyberbullying is a growing concern for educators and parents and has far-reaching implications. Getting smart about this phenomenon can help staunch new cases of online bullying.

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