

THE PROFESSIONAL BUS DRIVER SERIES

Dealing and Communicating with Parents

Reference Guide and Test

Produced by Video Communications

INTRODUCTION

School bus drivers must get their precious cargo to their destination safely. Another challenge for school bus drivers is to be able to communicate with students and staff effectively. And let's not forget what is becoming one of the most significant issues for school bus drivers, learning how to deal with irate parents.

The video is designed to give you communication techniques that can be utilized when talking with parents. We understand that you are school bus drivers - not psychologists. The information in the video will help you in your pursuit of a safe bus. The video also uses multiple examples to get across these points. The video is broken into 4 sections.

- *Understanding the Importance of Communication*
- *Improving Communication with Parents*
- *Techniques to Diffuse a Volatile Situation*
- *Additional Techniques and Resources*

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

1) Do you notice how effectively staff handles returns and communicates with their customers at department stores? The reason for this is that they have been trained to deal with difficult customers and they are good at solving problems. Therefore, it's a good idea to copy this effective form of communication.

2) Effective communication skills is a proven winner when encountering confrontational parents. **Communication is the exchange of information, ideas and feelings from one person to another.** The goal of communicating with someone is to come to an understanding. If there is no understanding, there is NO communication.

3) Communication consists of **verbal and non-verbal communication**, as well as listening. Realize that communication problems between parents and school staff often comes down to 'how' something is said instead of what is said. It's important that you understand the difference between verbal and non verbal communication.

a) *Verbal Communication* means to communicate with words to try and come to an understanding or an agreement.

b) *Non Verbal Communication* is when words are not spoken, yet feelings are being conveyed. Body language can express the content of a message. Facial expressions and gestures are a couple of examples of non verbal communication.

4) When there is a discrepancy between verbal and non verbal communication, often non verbal communication is selected. And that's when problems arise

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

5) The goal of proper communication is trying to come to an agreement or an understanding. In order to come to an understanding you have to actually understand what is being said. This means carefully and attentively listening to what the other person is saying to you.

6) *Active listening* is the practice of paying close attention to a speaker. It's also about asking questions in order to clarify issues. And that is one of the key concepts in active listening. You have to be able to take in and absorb all of the information being conveyed to you so you can accurately come up with suggestible solutions.

7) *Did you know that humans speak at a rate of 100 to 180 words per minute, but can listen at a rate of 500-600 words per minute?* This means that the information coming in can far exceed the information going out.

8) As you may recall in the video, a student is disciplined because he was bullying another student. After the bus driver disciplines the student, he sends a text to his mother. The mother shows up at a bus stop and immediately starts yelling at the driver. In the example, the driver did not actively listen to the parent and instead she chose to argue with the angry mother. She made another mistake by insulting the student being disciplined. The student's mother became infuriated. That is **not** the way the bus driver should have handled that situation.

9) Here are some basic listening techniques you can use when talking with parents:

a) **Give parents your undivided attention**

- b) **Encourage parents to communicate**
- c) **Verify what you hear**
- d) **Clarify what you don't understand**
- e) **Acknowledge the parent's feelings**

10) Follow the steps listed above and you will be significantly decreasing the communication gap between yourself and parents of students who ride your bus.

11) Once you have done your due diligence by employing active listening techniques and understanding the parents concerns, you can begin communicating with the parent.

12) When speaking with parents be sure to:

- a) **Speak clearly and concisely**
- b) **Be specific**
- c) **Communicate with the parent, not the student**
- d) **Be Polite**
- e) **Be Professional**

13) Do not let your personal emotions or history with a particular student affect your professionalism. Always take the high ground. And remember to never talk down to a parent

14) A lack of knowledge about *cultural differences* can cause communication problems. When communicating with someone from a different culture, you do so using beliefs from your own culture. People from different cultures do likewise. Knowledge of different cultures is critical for effective communication with parents. You should take the time to learn about cultures in your district. **This will help close the communication gap between you and parents of a different culture.**

15) Guidelines to remember when **communicating with a parent from another culture:**

- a) **Be Respectful**

b) **Treat People as Individuals**

c) **Be Patient**

d) **Recognize Differences**

16) It's important to realize that **their culture differers in many respects from your culture**. In the video we gave an example of this. The *driver used the parent's child as a communication tool*. The parent got her message across and they came to an understanding. By using simple techniques, it will make your job a whole lot easier. Parents from different cultures will appreciate your patience, time, and willingness to learn.

TECHNIQUES TO DIFFUSE A VOLATILE SITUATION

17) School bus drivers have a lot of daily responsibilities. Throw an angry parent into the picture and their plate is overflowing with another difficult issue. So, how do you deal with a parent that is refusing to communicate with you? How can you diffuse the situation when a parent becomes angry and defensive?

18) In the video, we go back to the angry parent who boarded the bus. The bus driver became argumentative and tuned out the parent. The driver felt this was the way to handle the situation, Right?Wrong! As a professional school bus driver you must be able to get your point across without falling into the trap of being caught up in a volatile situation

19) There are several reasons that a parent might get upset or angry. Here are a few:

- **Early / Late Bus**
- **Denial of School Transportation Service**
- **Their Child Being Disciplined**
- **Lack of Communication with Transportation Staff**
- **Inconvenienced**

20) Obviously, when the driver became confrontational it only angered the parent more. And here is where the driver made a mistake. The driver did not actively listen to this parent. She cut the parent off mid sentence to try and get her point across. This is not how

it's done. Make sure to let the parent vent. Do not interrupt. Your objective is to keep your cool.

21) In the video, we then show what happens when the driver takes a different approach to the situation. The bus driver utilizes a softer, less aggressive tone of voice and her body language reflects this change in attitude. Although, it still wasn't a completely happy ending, it ended with better results.

22) ***The driver remained calm.*** When you remain calm, the angry parent sees you as being respectful and willing to listen. Even when the parent became personal with the driver, the driver did not get defensive and held her ground.

23) It is not productive to try and convince an angry parent that you are correct. ***The bus driver knew her stance was justified. However, she didn't waste her time trying to prove the parent was wrong.*** That would have worsened the situation instead of improving it.

24) ***The bus driver also remained respectful.*** Treat people disrespectfully and often times that's how they will treat you. If you treat them with respect and you don't argue with what they are saying, they will most likely listen to what you are saying.

25) And remember, actively listening to the parent will not only demonstrate that you want communication with the parent, but it will show you that you can really hear the parent out. The parent can then realize that you are trying to resolve the issue fairly.

ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUES AND RESOURCES

26) ***Information about students in school settings, which also include the school bus, is confidential information.*** A breach of confidentiality is a serious offense that could result in disciplinary action or dismissal. **Always maintain student confidentiality!** There is no need to paint a picture for everyone on board the bus. Parents will appreciate that you keep their child's information strictly confidential.

27) When a situation becomes too aggressive for you to tackle alone, seek help. ***You can rely on the school team. They will support you when a parent becomes too volatile or angry to communicate with.*** We make this evident in the video when a meeting between the driver, parent, student and supervisor takes place. The driver was able to rely on her supervisor for additional support. This results in better lines of communication between

the driver and the parent.

28) ***Stay proactive with parents.*** Don't wait for a problem to arise. ***Communicate daily.*** That way you and parents can remain on the same page. Then, when something does come up, you have already established a good relationship and good communication with the parent.

CLOSING

In the video, we covered several issues for dealing and communicating with parents. We also discussed the the basic understanding about the different types of communication that can be utilized when engaging with angry or frustrated parents. In addition, we have provided techniques that can be used and resources that can be incorporated into proper communication. Remember to stay calm, keep your cool and remain pro active. Remember to take extra time when communicating with angry parents or parents from a different cultural background. Remember to rely on the school team when it becomes necessary to do so. Remember, You are the professional.

TEST QUESTIONS

1) The best way to communicate is through Non-Verbal communication.

TRUE or FALSE?

2) Humans speak at a rate of 500-600 words per minute.

TRUE or FALSE?

3) When applying active listening techniques you should:

a) Give parents your undivided attention

b) Encourage parent's communication

c) Verify what you hear

d) Clarify what you don't understand

e) All of the above

4) There is no use trying to communicate with people from other cultures because you simply cannot understand each other.

TRUE or FALSE?

5) If a parent is irate, you should allow that parent to vent.

TRUE or FALSE?

6) When speaking to a parent, speak to their child as well.

TRUE or FALSE?

7) If you treat a parent disrespectfully, often times that's how they will treat you.

TRUE or FALSE?

8) When an incident takes place, do not paint a picture for everyone on board.

TRUE or FALSE?

9) Ongoing communication with parents is key to maintaining healthy communication.

TRUE or FALSE?

10) You should try all you can to justify that you are in the right.

TRUE or FALSE?

ANSWER KEY

1) FALSE

2) FALSE

3) e

4) FALSE

5) TRUE

6) FALSE

7) TRUE

8) TRUE

9) TRUE

10) FALSE