

## **Back to School Safety Tips**

Lawrence Township Public Schools started on September 4th and it is a good time to review some tips to ensure everyone has a safe school year. Whether your child is starting his or her first day of kindergarten or finishing his/her last year in high school. We all have one thing in common; we care about our children's safety. It is important that they enjoy their years in school and return home safely each day.

One way to ensure this is a safe school year is to go over a few, simple rules. Practice with your child how to safely wait for and board the school bus. Take some practice trips to the school if your child is walking to school. Go over pedestrian safety procedures. If your older child is driving a car to school set rules and reinforce the traffic laws. The motoring public must also remember that school is back in session and they need drive extra carefully.

### **Riding the Bus**

According to the National Safety Council, school buses are the safest form of ground transportation. To keep your child safe around the school bus remember these safety tips:

- Have a safe place to wait for your bus, away from traffic and the street.
- Stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop and the driver signals you to enter.
- When being dropped off, exit the bus and walk ten giant steps away from the bus. Keep a safe distance between you and the bus. Also, remember that the bus driver can see you best when you are farther away from the bus.
- Use the handrail to enter and exit the bus.
- Wear a seatbelt and stay in your seat when on the bus.
- Stay away from the bus until the driver gives his/her signal that it's okay to approach.
- Be aware of the street traffic around you. Drivers *are* required to follow certain rules of the road concerning school buses, however, not all do. Be aware of your surroundings.

### **Walking to School**

Even if you don't ride in a motor vehicle, you still have to protect yourself. Because of minimal supervision, young pedestrians face a wide variety of hazardous situations while walking to and from school. Here are a few basic safety tips to follow:

- Obey all traffic signals and the crossing guard -- never cross the street against a light, even if you don't see any traffic coming.

- Cross only at a corner or in a marked crosswalk.
- Never cross in-between parked vehicles.
- Look left, right, left again and listen for traffic before crossing the street.
- Remain alert! Don't assume that cars see you or they are going to stop.
- Stay on the sidewalk. In areas with no sidewalks, walk as far off the roadway as possible. Remember to walk on the left side of the road, facing traffic.
- Walk with a buddy.
- Do not talk to strangers and never get in a vehicle of someone you do not know.
- Make sure your backpack is not too big or heavy.
- Wear bright and/or reflective material at night or in bad weather conditions.

### **Students Driving to School**

The older students that are taking a motor vehicle to school should remember these items as well as those listed below for motorists:

- Ensure that where you park is a legal area and is not posted as a "No Parking Area". In Lawrence Township Ordinance, #1937-07 prohibits parking on certain streets during school hours unless the vehicle has a special parking permit.
- If the student has a probationary driver's licenses ensure that NJSA 39:3-13.4 is obeyed. This includes that only one additional passenger is permitted in the vehicle if the probationary driver is under 21. All occupants are to be secured in a properly adjusted and fastened seat belt or child restraint. A probationary driver's license holder under 21 will not be allowed to drive between 11:01 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. unless a waiver has been issued. The holder of the probationary license under 21 shall not use any hand-held or hands-free interactive wireless communication device, except in an emergency, while operating a moving passenger automobile "Use" shall include, but not be limited to, talking or listening on any hand-held or hands-free interactive wireless communication device or operating its keys, buttons, or other controls. Two removable, transferable, highly visible, reflective decals, indicating the driver of the vehicle may be the holder of a learner's permit or probationary driver's license must be affixed to the vehicle when the driver is behind the wheel.

### **Motorists**

The motoring public can make children safer by following the laws of the road such as:

- Yield to pedestrians in crosswalks (NJSA 39:4-36)
- Obey the speed limits (NJSA 39:4-98)

- Do not block or park in crosswalks (NJSA 39:4-138b)
- Watch for pedestrians when turning right on a red traffic signal (NJSA 39:4-36)
- Keep your windshield clean and free of ice and frost for maximum visibility. (NJSA 39:3-74)
- Do not pass a vehicle stopped to allow a pedestrian to cross. (NJSA 39:4-36)
- Do not pass a school bus stopped for children (NJSA 39:4-128.1). It is illegal to pass a school bus picking up or dropping off students. Be prepared to stop on their signal. Wait and obey their direction, to turn or resume driving. Even when the bus turns off its flashing lights, drivers must remember that children may still be near the bus and their visibility may be blocked by its size. Children don't always think ahead, so you must drive with care. A motorist ticketed for passing a stopped school bus will be: (1) fined not less than \$100, (2) imprisoned for not more than 15 days or community service for not more than 15 days as the court may deem appropriate, (3) or both for the first offense. In addition to these fines and punishments a driver will also receive 5 points on his/her driver record for a conviction of this offense.
- Leave a few minutes earlier to prevent rushing, which can distract drivers.

Crossing Guards are an important extension of public safety. These trained professionals are posted at busy intersections near our schools and make sure children cross the street safely. Crossing guards are equipped with high visibility safety vests, hand held stop signs and traffic safety cones to make sure the intersections are even safer. Obey their directions, it's the law.

Citizens who observe any safety concerns or just have questions regarding the topic or would like information on becoming a school crossing guard should contact Lieutenant Charles Edgar at 609-844-7106.

This article was brought to you by the Lawrence Township Public Safety Advisory Committee in conjunction with the Lawrence Township Police Department. Meetings of the Public Safety Advisory committee are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. Meetings are held in the Manager's Conference Room located in Town Hall and are open to the public.