

Moving Kids Safely in Child Care: A Refresher Course

by Laura Dutil Aird, MS

“. . . a toddler fell and needed stitches, and her parents wanted me to meet them at the emergency room. There was a lot of blood, so I drove while another teacher held her in the back seat to keep pressure on the wound. Our center was only three blocks away from the hospital, yet another car hit us, and . . .”

“I removed my four year old from his preschool because they went on a field trip, and he told me he got to ride in the front seat of the director’s car because the van was broken . . .”

“A fatal accident killed the driver and three children who were being transported from child care to school; investigators said none of the children in the van were wearing appropriate restraints . . .”

Each year thousands of young children are killed or injured in car crashes. Although these situations are always tragic, they are particularly disturbing when known safety practices are not followed or a “well-meaning” adult isn’t aware of the recommended procedures and puts children at risk.

We all know the rules. The only way to make sure children are safe during transportation is to use the appropriate car

safety seats and seats belts correctly, every time. As an early childhood educator or child care professional, you might wonder if you are following the most up-to-date transportation safety guidelines. You might also question how to make the “safest” decision when something unexpected comes up.

This article provides a “refresher course,” including questions you can ask yourself and the information you need to protect the children in your care. Following these recommendations will help you reduce the risks and liability involved when transporting children.

Should our program transport children?

Whether to transport a child or not is a critical question, and this decision should be made thoughtfully. The responsible child care professional considers: parent wishes; legal, moral, and ethical issues; economic considerations; and the best interests of the child. The ability to transport children in your care safely can enhance their educational, developmental, and social experiences. Transportation guidelines are not exclusive or absolute measures of security. However, as a professional, you play a

key role in educating others, including parents and children, about child passenger safety. Your efforts can help people protect themselves and others throughout their lives.

What are the most up-to-date recommendations?

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care (2002) provides a comprehensive set of 707 health and safety standards for early education and child care programs, including family child care homes. These are the recommended standards approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (NRC). This manual includes standards on a variety of child care-related health and safety topics including transportation and child passenger safety issues. A full version of the national guidelines

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(along with key updates and details about obtaining print copies) can be found at: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/index.html>.

The NRC recognizes that parents are key partners in protecting young children and has developed a health and safety web site for parents with children in child care called, "Healthy Kids, Healthy Care." The web site can be found at: www.healthykids.us/. At this web site, you'll find a section on transporting children in child care that you can print as a handout and give to parents (click on "Safety" and then "Transportation").

What are some of the issues I need to consider?

Driver Requirements: You should always select drivers carefully. Make sure anyone who transports children for your program:

- Has a valid driver's license.
- Is an experienced driver with an excellent driving record.
- Displays a high level of maturity and caution.
- Has no criminal record (check specifically for evidence of substance abuse or child molestation).

Ask for and file copies of this person's driver's license and vehicle insurance, and obtain a new criminal background check every 3 to 6 months.

Vehicle Considerations: Multifunctional school activity buses or vehicles built to school bus standards are recommended. Fifteen passenger vans **do not** meet these standards and have an increased risk of rollover and loss of driver control in emergency maneuvers. This risk is even greater when there are ten or more passengers or the van is driven with incorrect tire pressures and

there are loads on top of the van.

Ratios and Supervision: Meet or exceed the staff to child ratios for child care facilities required in your state, even when transporting children. Drivers must be able to focus entirely on driving tasks, leaving the supervision of children to other adults in the vehicle. This is especially important with young children who will be sitting in close proximity to one another in the vehicle and may need care during the trip. Explain this policy to parent volunteers and require that the supervising adult stay with each child until the responsibility for that child has been accepted by the individual designated in advance to care for that child.

Written Policies: Develop an easy-to-understand transportation policy that can be posted and discussed with drivers, child care providers, and parents. Written policies will help you ensure your expectations about supervision and other responsibilities are clear. The policy can cover personal errands during "driving time," non-smoking, traffic violations and crashes, and describe back-up plans in case of staff absence or times when no one meets the vehicle when children are to be picked up or dropped off.

Loading Zone Plan: Carefully assess all pick-up and drop-off locations, and discuss plans for loading and unloading with children, child care providers, and drivers before each trip. It's best to increase supervision when children get in and out of vehicles, especially in the area right around the vehicle where the driver may not see small children or objects easily. Have a staff person observe what happens in the locations where parents are dropping off and picking up their children. This often allows for important insights that can be used to guide education of children, parents, etc. Find out who the traffic safety officer at your local police depart-

ment is and check to see if they can help you by observing practices, reviewing policies, training staff, and developing improvement plans.

Educating Others: Drivers and staff should be provided with written policies and orientation on general child passenger safety measures including: the proper use of car safety seats, booster seats, and seat belts; supervision requirements; and contingency/emergency plans. At least one staff member in the vehicle should be trained and hold a current certificate in pediatric first aid, rescue breathing, and first aid for choking. A first aid kit should be available to staff during travel and while they are on field trips. In addition, staff should be provided with a list of the children participating in the trip, any relevant medical information, and emergency contact numbers (in general and for each child).

Child care providers, other staff, and parents should serve as role models by wearing seat belts and making sure everyone in the vehicle is buckled up and in the appropriate seat restraint (shoulder-lap belt, car safety seat, or booster seat) **every time**.

Sometimes, we are tempted to look the other way or make an exception, "just this one time" because something unexpected has come up. Examples include times when:

- An appropriate child safety seat isn't available for a specific child.
- There are too many children to be transported safely in a vehicle.
- The driver cancels unexpectedly or your regular caregiver/teacher is ill or absent.
- It's an emergency and a child's life could be at stake.
- Someone in a position of authority (or even a personal friend) makes the wrong decision or urges you to disregard the policy "just once."

It's best to think ahead and always identify a "Plan B" and maybe even a "Plan C" for times when these temptations occur. When in doubt, it's best to make the correct and safe decision and "Just Say No." You can point to the policy, explain your rationale, or wait until later and have someone else help you justify your decision. Do this for yourself. While it may be challenging for you to be assertive at first, later you will realize you made the best decision — one that you and anyone you transport can live with.

For more information, including the most recent warnings/recommendations regarding 15-passenger vans and a sample policy that you can customize for your program, see the "Featured" section at www.aap.org/healthtopics/childcare.cfmp

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics

Information on Car Safety Seats and Transportation Safety
www.aap.org/healthtopics/carseatsafety

Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Parents 2006
www.aap.org/family/carseatguide

Early Education and Child Care Initiatives
www.healthychildcare.org
Phone: (888) 227-5409
E-mail: childcare@aap.org

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care (2002)
<http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/index.html>

Healthy Kids, Healthy Care: Web site for Parents with Children in Child Care
<http://www.healthykids.us/>

Child Safety Seat Tips

- Place infants in rear-facing seats until they are at least one year old and weigh at least 20 pounds. If a baby reaches 20 pounds before her first birthday, she should remain rear-facing at least until she turns one.
- A baby who weighs more than 20 pounds but is not yet one year old should ride in a convertible or infant-only seat with higher rear-facing weight and height limits. It is safest for children to ride rear-facing until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by the car safety seat manufacturer (30-35 pounds and up to 36 inches or more). These limits are listed on the seat's labels and in the instruction manual.
- Once children have outgrown the weight or height limit for their rear-facing seat, they should ride in a forward-facing toddler seat with a harness until they reach the weight or height limit for the seat (usually 40 pounds).
- Children who weigh more than 40 pounds but are not ready for a booster seat should ride in a seat with a harness or vest that has a higher weight limit.
- Children who have outgrown child safety seats with harnesses should ride in booster seats until the seat belt fits properly. This means that the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, the lap belt is low and snug across the upper thighs, and the child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with his legs bent without slouching and can stay in this position comfortably throughout the trip. This is usually around 4'9" tall and between 8 and 12 years of age.
- Read and follow the directions in both the vehicle owner's manual and the child safety seat instructions. If you are not sure you understand the directions, call the manufacturer of the seat.

"The Basics" — Important safety rules

Always use the proper vehicle restraint for each child (i.e., car safety seat, booster seat, or seat belt). Avoid using a second-hand (used) car safety seat unless you are certain of the seat's history.

- Remember that each car safety seat is different. The best car safety seat is one that:
 - Is used correctly **every time**.
 - Fits the child being transported (i.e., is right for their age/height).
 - Is properly positioned and installed in the vehicle being used.
- The safest place for all children to ride is in the back seat. Never place a child in a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag.
- Always supervise each child directly by sight and hearing; never leave a child unattended in a car safety seat whether it is in the car or in the child care center.
- Count and directly supervise all children, especially when loading/unloading them into a vehicle and transitioning from one place to another.
- Set a good example: always wear your seat belt. Check to ensure that everyone in your vehicle — even another adult — is buckled up!

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Directory of Transportation Providers

This directory represents a first step toward contacting transportation companies. To request free information from these institutions, visit www.ChildCareExchange.com or circle the number for each institution of interest on the Product Inquiry Card located between pages 64 and 65.

Circle 121 **ALL TRANS, LLC**
Harold Strain
8245 Cordova Road
Cordova, Tennessee 38016
(800) 726-1894
www.alltransco.com
harold@alltransco.com

All Trans offers a variety of shuttle buses, day care vehicles, and vans to meet your transportation needs.

Circle 122 **BLUE BIRD CORPORATION**
Diane Squires
PO Box 987
402 Blue Bird Boulevard
Fort Valley, Georgia 31030
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www.blue-bird.com
dksquire@blue-bird.com

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Circle 123 **COLLIN BUS CORPORATION**
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www.collinsbus.com
kelli.petz@collinsbus.com

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Circle 124 **CORBEIL BUS**
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Indianapolis, Indiana 46256
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Circle 125 **GIRARDIN MINIBUS, INC.**
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www.girardin.com
minibussales@girardin.com

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Circle 126 **MIDWEST TRANSIT EQUIPMENT/ CHILDCARE BUS**
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www.midwesttransit.com
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and affordable. Midwest Transit Equipment has the largest selection of new and used Multi-Function-School-Activity-Buses (MMFSAB) in the USA! We have vehicles in-stock and ready for immediate delivery. We offer custom designed graphics packages. Trade in your non-conforming vans. Creative financing and leasing programs are available. For more information please call us toll free (866) 933-2412 or visit our web site at www.midwesttransit.com.

Circle 127 **THOMAS BUILT BUSES**
Phyllis Summery
1408 Courtesy Road
High Point, North Carolina 27260
www.thomasbus.com
Phyllis.summery@thomasbus.com

Thomas Built Buses is North America's leading bus manufacturer, offering a full line of school, commercial, and child care buses to value-minded buyers. More than one-third of the buses on the road today are Thomas Built Buses. Since the first Thomas Built Bus rolled off the assembly line in 1936, the company has focused entirely on delivering the smartest, safest, and most innovative buses in North America.

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Oregon, Ohio 43618
(800) 227-3572
www.tescobus.com
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