

Supporting Young People on Home to School Transport – Guidance for Passenger Assistants

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Dear Passenger Assistant

The journey between home and school is a key part of the school day and you have an important role to play, as many of the pupils that we transport require consistency and routine.

This handbook has been produced by Staffordshire County Council Transport Team to support staff in conducting their duties and will also act as an induction document for new employees and as a refresher for existing employees.

We hope to take you on a learning journey to equip you with the skills you will need to provide a safe, happy and enjoyable service to the young people in your care.

Together we transport some of the most vulnerable people in Staffordshire to schools and colleges, we all face many complex and challenging situations daily to deliver pupils safely and timely to their educational opportunities.

We couldn't do it without the care and dedication of people like you.

Good luck in your new job and we look forward to working with you in the future and a big thank you to our existing passenger assistants who are already providing a valuable service for our children and young adults.

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Passenger Assistant Handbook

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Section 1 - The role of a Passenger Assistant

As a passenger assistant it is your job to accompany and support passengers on home to school transport, the duties you will be required to carry out include:

- Acting as a point of contact between school and parents.
- Assisting passengers get on and off the vehicle.
- Assisting drivers with the securing of wheelchairs and baggage before a journey begins.
- Support passengers throughout the journey.
- Communicate effectively with your passengers & be able to identify when passengers are in distress.
- Interact safely & appropriately with them on an individual basis.
- Accompanying passengers after their journey, where necessary.
- Managing behaviours.
- Comply with on-site instructions from the school.
- To act in accordance with Health & Safety Legislation.
- Keeping the vehicle tidy between journeys.
- Ensure you follow good safeguarding practice to keep yourself and the pupils safe.

1.1 Caring for young people on transport

1.1.a - Before the journey

- It is good practice for driver & passenger assistant to meet family and pupil as part of a transition meeting before the contract starts.
- Know the names and needs of all your passengers, seek assistance from parents and school staff.
- Obtain emergency contact details for schools and parents.
- Prepare a seating plan, in advance according to the needs of the passengers.
- Passenger assistant and the driver are a team, and you should work together & ensure that the everyone on transport travels safely, ensure you have a plan of action in place for emergency situations.
- Passenger assistants must be on the vehicle prior to the first passenger and not leave the vehicle until all passengers are delivered safely to their destination.

1.1.b - Caring for children during the journey

- You must be able to communicate effectively with your passengers & be able to identify when passengers are in distress, how to interact safely & appropriately with them on an individual basis.
- Be able to address behaviour issues on transport effectively & appropriately. Speak to parent & school to find out how to deal with issues that arise on transport, i.e., trigger behaviour.
- Assist passengers onto and off transport, (if required).
- Ensure that passengers are seated, and seat belt fastened prior to the vehicle moving, i.e., a verbal indication should be given to driver before vehicle moves.
- You need to be able to interact appropriately with the passengers throughout the journey to make sure that they are occupied, you are key to ensuring that the passenger has a good start and end to the school day.
- Be positioned in the appropriate place on the vehicle.
- Passengers are not to be left on the vehicle alone at any time during the journey this includes picking up other passengers.
- Any information passed to you from parents should be passed onto the school and vice versa.
- Keep parents up to date with any changes to transport arrangements – especially in an emergency.
- Ensure safe handover of pupil to school or parent.

1.1.c - After the journey

- Any major incidents that occur on transport need to be reported to, your company, school & parents.
- Any information passed to you from parents should be passed onto the school and vice versa.
- Keep parents up to date with any changes to transport arrangements – especially in an emergency.
- Assist passengers onto and off transport, (if required).
- Check for lost property and take to the school office or report to base.

Section 2 - Expected codes of conduct whilst working on transport

2.1 Use of Confidential or Personal Information

You may in the course of your duties obtain confidential information including home addresses, pupils care needs etc.

You must:

- Work within the requirements of Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- You must not misuse your position by seeking information which you do not need to know to carry out your duties.

You must not:

- Pass on any information received or obtained through your employment to anyone who is not entitled to have that information.
- Use information for personal advantage.
- Gossip or share information about pupils or their families.
- Take videos or photos of students.
- Exploitation of confidential information for personal gain.

2.2 - Equal Opportunities

The County Council is committed to eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in all that we do.

We aim to ensure that everyone we work with is treated equally and not in any way disadvantaged by factors which could prevent the implementation of fair policies and operations.

We would request that you recognize the differences which exist and will seek to understand the needs of people within the groups which are afforded protection or assistance through this policy.

We expect all passenger assistants to uphold its Equal Opportunity in Employment Policy and to accept the duty not to discriminate, either in employment practices or in the provision of facilities and services by reference to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

2.3 – Awareness of Discrimination, Harassment, and Victimization

You must treat all pupils, parents, school staff with courtesy and respect, and must not make any remarks or gestures relating to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation which may cause offence.

Any complaint of discrimination, harassment, or victimization or complaints made on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics listed above, will be taken seriously and will be the subject of a thorough investigation.

During the course of your work should you encounter any incidents from pupils, parents or school staff then please report this to your base who will contact us to seek support and advice.

2.4 - Fitness for Work

Staffordshire County Council aims to provide a safe and healthy environment for all pupils, employees, and contractors.

Certain factors can make the workplace unsafe, especially in the safety critical industry of school transport.

The consumption of drugs and alcohol can impair judgement and physical co-ordination, this can affect the safety of the individual under the influence of alcohol and any pupils in their care.

You must:

- Ensure that the use of alcohol out of working hours does not adversely affect your work performance, the health, safety or welfare of yourself or others.
- Not consume or be under the influence of alcohol, use illicit drugs or other illegal substances while on school transport or school premises.

2.5 - Health and Safety

Whilst working on transport you have a duty to take reasonable care of yourself and to co-operate with management under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

You are required to act in accordance with this policy and generally to act in such a way to ensure your own safety and that of others.

These responsibilities are identified in your company Health and Safety policy and any action which potentially puts at risk the health and/or safety of yourself or others will be viewed seriously and may result in disciplinary action may be taken.

2.6 - Smoking

Public health laws in the UK state that enclosed or substantially enclosed workplaces and public places must be smoke free.

You are not permitted to smoke on school transport or on school premises at any time and smoking whilst on premises of the school may be subject to disciplinary action.

2.7 - Dress Code

There is a general expectation that dress will be appropriate to the nature of the duties and responsibilities of your job.

The transport unit values and welcomes the ethnic diversity of all its staff and contractors and therefore dress codes will take account of ethnic and religious dress requirements with sensitivity ensuring that employees are free to observe them.

Where there is a clear justification or a health and safety reason then the transport unit may introduce appropriate dress codes to suit the educational establishment identity.

2.8 - Effective Communication Skills

Passenger assistants must possess the ability to communicate effectively with pupils they transport in order to ensure both their physical safety and well-being.

In addition, they require the ability to give clear and precise details to the emergency services in the event of an accident or incident which may include a driver becoming incapacitated.

For transport teams whose first language differs from pupils in their care they are reminded to give consideration to the needs of their passengers and to use a common language when undertaking work activities.

Section 3 - Dealing with the unexpected & emergency situations

3.1 – General guidance

You may from time to time encounter difficult or even emergency situations. No two situations are likely to be the same and much must be left to your knowledge and experience to deal with them, but you should remember that the safety and well-being of your passengers must be your first consideration.

The following guidelines are a “common sense” approach to dealing with the unexpected.

- Ask the driver to stop the vehicle.
- Assist the driver to assess the situation, the environment, and the risks.
- Seek assistance - contact your line manager or the emergency services.
- Ensure the safety of the passengers and yourself.
- Do not move an injured person.
- Record and report the incident.
- Always carry a notebook or diary with you to record anything out of the ordinary which may occur in the course of your work.

3.2 - Passenger's illness

If a passenger falls ill during a journey, you should take them to the nearest point of assistance, for example:

- The Passenger’s school.
- The Passenger’s home.
- Accident and Emergency.

If you have an emergency situation on board (e.g., a passenger having a seizure) you should call 999 and ask for an ambulance to meet you. Whichever option you choose will depend on the severity of the illness and the point you have reached in the journey.

You must make contact with your line manager, transport unit, parents or school and inform them of the action you have taken.

3.3 - Absconders

If a passenger gets out of your vehicle along the route other than at their intended destination you should try to stop them by calling them back. If they refuse to return do not leave your vehicle to follow them if there are other passengers on board. Notify your line manager or the transport unit as quickly as possible and take their advice about continuing your journey.

3.4 - Nobody home to meet pupil

If you arrive at a child's home and no one is in, attempt to contact the parent using the emergency numbers provided.

Should you receive no response contact the school, transport unit or your line manager immediately and advise them of the situation.

They will endeavour to make contact with the carer/parents or school. Keep the child on board and continue with the run, returning when the other passengers are safely home.

If the carer is still not in, the passenger assistant should again telephone the transport unit for advice. A note should be left at the home advising the carers/parents where the child has been taken and a contact telephone number.

As a last resort Staffordshire has an Emergency Duty Team who can be contacted on telephone [0300 111 8007](tel:03001118007) and select option 1.

Under no circumstances should you take the child to your home or operator base, or leave with a neighbour unless this has been pre-arranged and documented by parent and school.

Section 4 - Safeguarding young people on transport

Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe and has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

Staff who work with children will receive safeguarding training, that explains their duties for minimising risk and to ensure everyone working on school transport knows what to do if a safeguarding concern arises, and how to act in the best interest of the child.

Please ensure you follow the guidance provided in the training developed and delivered by the Staffordshire Safeguarding Childrens Board at all times, the following information serves as a gentle reminder and is no substitute for the comprehensive information provided on that course.

4.1 – What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.

It aims to:

- Protect children from abuse and maltreatment.
- Prevent harm to children's health or development.
- Ensure children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Children may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives.

These threats can take a variety of different forms, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse; neglect; domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

4.2 - Protecting yourself from allegations

ALWAYS

- Always follow your Safeguarding training.
- Always display your I.D badge.
- Make sure your employer keeps you signed up to the update service.
- Be vigilant to signs of abuse or neglect.
- Always report your concerns.
- Seek advice from parents and school about an individual's needs.
- Remain calm, professional, friendly, and approachable always.

NEVER

- ✗ Give individuals gifts, food, or drink whilst on transport.
- ✗ Hug or kiss pupils.
- ✗ Offer to discuss or keep secrets with a child.
- ✗ Get over involved with families & their personal situations.
- ✗ Physically restrain or use force, administer punishment, or threaten an individual.
- ✗ Administer medication.
- ✗ Take photos or videos of pupils.
- ✗ Share videos or photos with pupils.
- ✗ Exchange personal details or phone numbers with young people.
- ✗ Accept invitations to be friends on social media.
- ✗ Assume someone else is or has reported it.

Section 5 - Managing challenging behaviour on transport

Managing challenging behaviour can be incredibly stressful for parents, teachers, and transport staff. An outburst may be a known reaction to a daily activity, or sometimes it may be so out of the blue and you are struggling to work out what has caused it.

As a passenger assistant it is important to get to know the young people you transport so you can identify their reactions to stressful situations and offer support.

Please be aware that a child who cannot communicate what they want may display challenging behaviour as a way of communicating this frustration. This may become a behaviour that is recognized by others as "naughty", but it is important for you to recognise the difference.

5.1 - Potential causes of challenging behaviour in young people and examples of common reactions to them:

- When a child is feeling unwell or in pain, they may find it difficult to communicate this to others and head banging is often a way of coping with the pain or discomfort.
- If a child feels frustrated at being told off or not being understood, self-harm can be a way of communicating this frustration.
- If a child feels upset or distressed about something, perhaps a change in routine they may bite their own hand to help them to cope with these feelings.
- Boredom or lack of stimulation may lead to skin picking.
- Some young people have a lack of understanding for example, what's edible or inedible.
- Some young people have enhanced sensory needs, so they explore how things feel or smell such as grabbing at a seat-belt.
- When seeking attention or wanting a reaction young people may display what appears to be challenging behaviour.

5.2 - Types of challenging behaviour:

Every child reacts to stress or excitement in different ways and some of the behaviours you may encounter on transport include:

- Self-injury or self-harm - This can present as head banging, hand or arm biting, hair pulling, eye gouging, face or head slapping, skin picking, scratching, or pinching and forceful head shaking.
- Being aggressive - Hurting others; biting, pinching, slapping, spitting, hair pulling and screaming or shouting.
- Being destructive - Throwing things, breaking furniture, ripping things up.
- Pica - Eating or mouthing non-edible items, such as stones, dirt, pen lids and metal objects.
- Repetition - Rocking, repetitive speech and repetitive actions or manipulation of objects.

5.3 - Tips for managing challenging behaviour on transport

Unfortunately, when trying to support pupils with challenging behaviour there is no magic formula, every child is different and what works with one pupil will not work with another.

Having said all this there is a great deal that can be done to prevent and reduce the incidence of challenging behaviour.

- Get to know your passengers, learn to recognize the warning signs prior to the behaviour and intervene early, some children respond well to soothing music or have a comforting toy or book.
- Be calm but assertive, keep your face neutral and lower the volume and pitch of your voice.
- Be consistent in your language and behaviour, consistency of both is vitally important to the young people you transport.
- Use simple language and acknowledge their frustration, show them you understand.
- Avoid confrontation and don't take it personally.
- Consider what the young person might be trying to say with their behaviour – Are they saying, "I'm in pain" or "can you help me".
- Use praise when they get things right or begin to calm down e.g., 'well done you put your seatbelt on' or 'You've stopped shouting'.
- Try to check things out for yourself. If you change something does that stop the behaviour? what worked to quickly calm the passenger?
- Can you teach the person to tell you what they want without challenging behaviour? For example, does the behaviour happen when you ask the pupil to put their seatbelt on?
- When instances occur minimize the risk and keep them safe. For example, if pupil is banging their head, use a pillow or your hand to keep their head from hitting a hard surface.
- Avoid physically restraining a child unless they are in immediate danger such as about to run into traffic, stopping the movements may cause the behaviour to continue or get worse.

5.4 - Dealing with excessively disruptive behaviour

- If a passenger is very disruptive or destructive during a journey, you should ask the driver to stop the vehicle as soon as it is safe to do so.
- You should assess the situation, making use of any advice which the school or care establishment has given you about how to manage their behaviour.
- Reassure other passengers.

- Tell the passenger clearly to stop the disruptive or destructive behaviour.
- Physical intervention may be justified only in exceptional circumstances where there is a serious and immediate risk of harm to the passenger concerned, or to any other person, or to prevent serious damage to property.
- You must remember that you still have a duty of care to the passenger.
- If all the above fails and you still have a potentially dangerous situation that you feel unable to deal with, remain parked, with hazard lights switched on if appropriate, and summon assistance from the school, parent or in severe cases the Police.
- Ensure you record and report the incident to your line manager and school staff.

5.5 - Where to get help

Whilst I am confident if you follow this guidance and training, you will be able to handle most issues on transport, you are not alone and there is help available to you if a pupils behaviour becomes unmanageable for you.

- Report and incidents to your line manager or school and parents in a non-judgemental way, seek their support to help you manage the behaviour.
- Separate the behaviour from the child and consider the parents feelings of protection towards their child.
- Some students may be issued with a risk assessment or positive behaviour management plan when provided ensure you familiarize yourself with these documents.
- Harnesses and other support devices can be issued but should only be used as a last resort. They must be used in conjunction with the seatbelt on the vehicle.
- If a child appears aggressive or angry you can refuse to transport but this should be considered a last resort.
- The transport unit can offer support and advice to you via your line manager.

Thank you for reading and Good Luck in your new role!

