

Fairfax County Police Department



Hello Parents and Students! We are about to start the 2016-2017 school year and the Fairfax County Police Department would like to remind everyone that we need to work together to ensure that everyone has a safe school year. We would like to remind you that there are several traffic-related safety issues that, if ignored, could create unsafe situations. These situations include Speeding, Stop Signs, School Buses, Stopping on the Roadway, and Seatbelts. Let's call them the "5 S's of Safety."

Speeding: School zones are marked with "25 MPH" flashing signs called Wink-o-Matics. These flashing lights start 30 minutes prior to the start of school and remain on 30 minutes after dismissals. During those time periods the speed limit is 25 MPH. Do not ignore those signs if you do not see children crossing! It is not worth the risk to strike a pedestrian or get a ticket. Speeds higher than 25 MPH can be enforced with separate speeding laws that bring higher fines and increased points. We all need to do our part by slowing down to protect children and parents who are crossing at points other than crosswalks. In a 25 MPH zone, pedestrians are allowed to cross the roadway at any location that is safe to cross.

Stop Signs: Stop Signs are installed at locations where a FULL STOP is necessary for everyone's safety. Many drivers do not see anyone coming and roll through the sign. Will you have enough time to stop for the child running to catch up to their friends, or a child who suddenly rides a bike across the street thinking your car is going to stop for them? A full stop means that your wheels stop turning and you feel the weight of your vehicle shift. Always assume that the pedestrian is going to cross whether they have the right-of-way or not. Parents should remind their children that they need to make sure cars have stopped before entering the street, and to WAIT for the crossing guard to wave them across a guarded crossing.

School Buses: School buses pose a specific traffic-safety issue when their red lights are flashing. Many drivers get confused about when they have to stop and when they can pass a school bus with flashing lights. ALL drivers must stop when a school bus is loading / unloading when there are no raised medians or walls between their travel lanes and the school bus. State Law does not give an exception for how far the stop sign has been extended on the school bus. In fact, the *stop sign* is not mentioned in the law so drivers must be stopped when the red lights begin flashing and **shall not pass** the school bus. Police follow the school buses and are ready to issue reckless driving tickets. The penalty includes \$2,500 in fines and loss of your license for six months /180 days in jail. We like to remind drivers that "where there are buses, there are children," who will run to and from a school bus and sometimes cross roadways without looking both ways. When we see the yellow lights flashing on the bus, assume that the red lights are about to start, and be ready to stop.

Stopping on the Roadway: Some drivers stop in the middle of the roadway to load and unload passengers. This is EXTREMELY dangerous with children who might exit on the roadway side of a vehicle. State Law does not allow loading and unloading of passengers from a roadway. Stopping in the middle of the road where it is not safe can

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cause accidents and injuries. Please load and unload children in the designated Kiss and Ride locations, or from designated, safe parking locations. Many school zones experience congested avenues where parents are parking to pick up their kids instead of using the Kiss and Ride. This makes for a dangerous, narrow roadway. Tickets may be issued for illegal parking in and around schools because of the safety issues that are created.

Seatbelts: State Law requires everyone 17 and under (meaning anyone under the age of 18) to be seat-belted at all times. We like to remind drivers that seatbelts need to be worn “All the time, Everytime.” This is important for children. The short drive from home to school may be the time when an accident occurs. Children need to be seat-belted until the car reaches its location and has stopped. Officers have been ticketing drivers who pull up in front of school with unbelted children. Children should not be in the habit of removing seatbelts because they “see the school” or because they are “almost there.” Drivers CAN be stopped for unbelted children and ticketed.

The American Automobile Association (AAA) has issued six guidelines to keep students safe during the school year. Please take the time to review them as well.

- Slow down. Speed limits in school zones are reduced for a reason. A pedestrian struck by a vehicle traveling at 25 mph is nearly two-thirds less likely to be killed compared to a pedestrian struck by a vehicle traveling just 10 mph faster.
- Eliminate distractions. Children often cross the road unexpectedly and may emerge suddenly between two parked cars. Research shows that taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds doubles your chances of crashing.
- Reverse responsibly. Every vehicle has blind spots. Check for children on the sidewalk, driveway and around your vehicle before slowly backing up. Teach your children to never play in, under or around vehicles - even those that are parked.
- Talk to your teen. Car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the United States, and more than one in four fatal crashes involving teen drivers occur during the after-school hours of 3 to 7 p.m.
- Come to a complete stop. Research shows that more than one third of drivers roll through stop signs in school zones or neighborhoods. Always come to a complete stop, checking carefully for children on sidewalks and in crosswalks before proceeding.
- Watch for bicycles. Children on bikes are often inexperienced, unsteady and unpredictable. Slow down and allow at least three feet of passing distance between your vehicle and the bicycle. If your child rides a bicycle to school, require that they wear a properly-fitted bicycle helmet on every ride.

With this information provided we can all work together to be safe and happy during this school year!



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