

Riding a Public Bus Independently

Initial Steps

(Note: There is a vignette on the DVD based on this material.●)

Ian used to ride a school bus when he went to school. He had to walk down to the end of his street at 7:30 each morning to meet the bus. The bus was usually on time except in poor weather, and in those cases, the school district would often call to let his parents know. Ian got to know the bus driver, Tony, very well because Tony was always very friendly. Ian also got to know many of the other students on the bus, and they would often laugh and joke on their way to school. Ian had been apprehensive about riding the bus to school at first, but it soon became an activity he looked forward to each morning.

Now Ian is out of school, with a job that requires him to take a public bus each day from his home. There are many differences between the two buses, so as the person helping to direct Ian's new situation, you may want to begin by taking him to a central bus station so he will be able to see the public buses come and go. You may also want to go on a bus ride to some destination in your town. You could use those opportunities to discuss the differences between the school and public buses.

SCHOOL BUSES VS. PUBLIC BUSES

Make sure Ian fully digests the following:

1. The bus driver may not be the same every day—even if the bus is taken at the same time.
2. The bus driver may not be particularly friendly. Many drivers will be friendly, but you cannot count on that.
3. The bus could run late. No one will call you to tell you this. It is important to be prepared for this, especially in poor weather.
4. You have to pay to ride the bus each time you ride, though you may decide to use a bus pass. See the planning section below for ideas on this.
5. The bus waits for no one. Just know that, in most cases, if you miss a bus, another one will come along—you just may have to wait a while.
6. There are rules on public buses:
 - a) No food.
 - b) No drinks.
 - c) No loud music.

You may want to impose additional rules depending on Ian's personal profile. If you think talking on a cell phone (non-emergency) or listening to a walkman would cause him not to pay attention,

you may want to tell him that we are not going to use those things until he has more experience. Of course, you want to tell him that he can always use his cell phone in case of an emergency. Then again, an iPod or a Walkman may help Ian calm himself or offer just enough distraction for success; look at individual needs here.

7. The public bus will be much quieter. Many of the people on the bus will be going to work, so it is a much more serious environment.
8. There will be “strangers” on the bus. Most likely, everyone else on the bus will be a stranger to Ian, at least initially.
9. As with the bus driver, some of the passengers will be friendly, others will not. Saying “hi” or “good morning” could be the extent of communication with them. There is a chance that no one on the bus will say anything in response.
10. Ian will have to signal to the driver when he wants to get off, by using whatever method is on the bus—usually pulling a cord or pushing a button. Otherwise the driver will not stop.

PLANNING

Once you have reviewed the differences between a school bus and a public bus, it is time to plan the trip.

1. Look at the bus routes and schedules along with Ian. Determine the best route for him to take to work. Write the number of the bus on an index card for him to keep in his pocket. Index cards are good because they are stiff and do not crumple easily. You might also consider laminating the cards.
 2. Determine that Ian is always going to take his charged cell phone with him every time he gets on the bus. He should always let his care provider know when he is leaving the house. If he gets hurt, sick, or becomes afraid for any reason, he is to call his care provider or 911 (if it is “serious”). He should always call if his plans change—in any way—so no one worries about him. Ian’s care provider should be “speed dialed” into Ian’s cell so he can call if he gets scared, sick, or does not know what to do. Information under “ICE” (“in case of emergency”) should also be stored on Ian’s phone, in case he is unable to relate this information to another person.
 3. Figure out method of payment to be used each time. Is he going to use money or a bus pass? Whichever is chosen, he has to be ready when he gets on the bus. That means he either has to keep a lot of change at his house or keep track of where the bus pass is. Strategies: Have him keep the pass in his billfold or put it on a neck lanyard and then put it in the same place every time at both work and home. If he is paying daily, he should keep a bag of quarters at home for the bus and use a wallet or coin purse to hold the exact amount for each day. It should be prepared the night before as part of the night-time ritual.
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Transportation

4. The bus could get crowded and people could bump into Ian. This could be very irritating to him, so he may want to practice his response if something like this happens. For example, he could put a thin briefcase, or a light jacket next to himself so there would at least be *something* between him and another rider. He may also want to practice deep breathing in case a situation like this cannot be avoided.
5. Ian may need to practice what to say to the bus driver. Set up chairs to serve as the bus, have someone role-play a bus driver, and have Ian practice what he would say in different situations. For example: "Is this bus number 2, going to Central Avenue?"
6. What if Ian misses his stop? Most likely, he will be able to get off at the next stop and either walk a little further or take a return bus back to his regular stop. You may want to practice this on one of the bus trips.

SAFETY

Review safety rules with Ian before he gets on the bus.

1. Do not give out personal information including last name, address, or phone number.
 2. Have Ian practice saying the following when he gets on the bus: "I am going to work. I have to get off at the Taco Bell" (or wherever he needs to get off). Hopefully, if he says this when he gets on the bus, the driver will keep an eye out for him.
 3. Teach Ian to talk to the bus driver if there is a problem.
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THE FIVE PHASES

1. **Planning and Safety**—Review the previous information on the differences between a school bus and a public bus, and the planning and safety sections.
2. **Riding the Bus**—In this phase, the helper will stay at Ian's side and show him all the steps of riding the bus.
 - a. Before Ian gets on the bus, make sure he has taken care of his hygiene, is nicely dressed, and has his cell phone.
 - b. With Ian at the bus stop, point to the sign that shows the bus stops at this location.
 - c. When you both see the bus you want, step up by the sign so the driver knows you want to get on. You may wave to the bus, too.
 - d. Model saying "Good morning" to the bus driver and put your money in the box. Ian may add, "Hi, I am going to work. I have to get off by the Taco Bell."
 - e. Help Ian determine which seat is best for him. He should sit close to the driver, so Ian may have the choice of sitting sideways or facing front.
 - f. You may talk to Ian about appropriate manners while he is on the bus.
 - g. Show Ian the bell he is to ring when he wants the bus to stop. It is also good to find a landmark for Ian to watch out for that coincides with when he is to ring the bell.
 - h. Have Ian join you in saying "Thanks" to the driver when getting off the bus. The only caution here is that some buses stop on a sidewalk that can be very busy with pedestrians or bikes or both. Always look both ways when getting off the bus!
3. **Helper Fades Support**—You may start at Ian's side and not say anything, then adjust further by standing right behind him. As Ian becomes more confident, you can become just another person on the bus. This may take a couple of bus trips or it could take quite a few more—it just depends on how Ian does.

As you begin to fade your assistance, it is important to allow Ian to figure things out on his own and even make mistakes. You should not jump right in and fix things quickly, unless of course, Ian is in danger. Allowing this kind of problem solving will help Ian really handle the independence alone. A good example of this would be if Ian forgets to ring the bell at his stop. You may want to intervene only if a couple of stops have passed and it looks as if Ian does not intend to ring the bell.

Transportation

4. **Follow in a Car**—In this phase, Ian will ride the bus independently and you will follow along in a car.
5. **Be Available by Phone**—Finally, Ian will travel independently but will call you when he is leaving and after he arrives at his destination.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Different people will have to spend varying amounts of time in each phase. Let them take the lead on when they are ready to move on. Likewise, you may be able to skip some phases.

Ian was encouraged each step of the way with a reward. Coming up with a reward or incentive system may be a crucial component of successful bus training. Create a unique one for each person.

Being able to ride a bus independently is a great accomplishment. It opens a world of opportunity to Ian. He will probably want to take the bus home from work. He may want to try to take the bus to different places all over his community, such as the recreation center, a movie, or even a restaurant. The possibilities are endless. For each new location, Ian may require additional training using a similar process, though with experience, he may not take as long to achieve mastery.