

Riding Smart



What's the hardest part of your school day? For some kids with bipolar disorder, the hardest part of the school day isn't at school! The hardest part of the school day may be the ride to and from school on the bus. Why? There are a lot of reasons for this and figuring out what makes the ride hard is the first step to making it better. So think about these questions. What bothers you on the bus?

- Loud noise
- Bumpy ride
- Too hot or too cold
- Annoying classmates
- Too excited from the day

So what is a kid supposed to do to make this ride better? Surviving the bus is a real challenge. But here are some "bus smart" tips. I hope this gives you some ideas.

1. **Find the best spot-** Where you sit on the bus can make all the difference. The very back of the bus can be the place where kids make the most noise and misbehave. It's also the "bumpiest" area so if either of these bother you, then avoid the back of the bus. The front of the bus may also be very loud because of engine noise. If this sets you off, then pick a place near the front of the middle section. Also think about if you need to be by a window or by the aisle. Some kids feel trapped if they can't see out. It may also be annoying to have all the kids bumping into you every time they walk down the middle to get off. Know yourself and where you need to sit. Talk to your parents about it. Even if there are assigned seats your parents can talk to your bus driver or your IEP team to make arrangements for you to sit in a different place.
2. **Get in your zone-** You may wish that you could wave a magic wand and make everyone else on the bus disappear. Of course you can't, but you may be able to go into your own "zone" or space. Many buses now allow kids to listen to music. Try bringing a cd or mp3 player and a headset. This can help you tune out what is going on around you. If you listen to your music and look out the window, the bus ride will feel like it goes by much faster.
3. **Know when it is too much-** Talk to your parents about what to do if you've had a really bad day at school and you just can't face the bus ride. Sometimes a different arrangement can be made for those really bad days (maybe one of your parents or grandparents could pick you up that day). Most parents would rather you call home than have a meltdown on the bus. Of course this won't

work if you call everyday for a ride home. It has to be only when you really need it. So talk to your parents ahead of time to make a plan. If both your parents work, it may be a grandparent who can pick you up once in a while.

4. ***Keep your hands busy***- If too much restless energy is the problem then think about what you can do to keep your mind and hands busy without getting into trouble. Do you have a squishy ball? Squeezing that in your hand can help you get rid of some of your energy. Some buses don't allow chewing gum but if yours does then this can also help you release energy.

5. ***Dealing with other kids***- It can be hard to deal with other kids after a long day at school. If there is one kid in particular that sets you off, then make sure that the adults know that you two can't be sitting close to each other. If you are being bullied, speak up. It's not okay to let that go on. Some kids feel that it is fun to hit each other or throw things. That's not okay for you to do or for anyone else to do to you.

6. ***Adult help***- Sometimes when a bus ride is just too much, it helps to have an adult along for the ride. Your parents may need to request that the bus have an aide ride along to help you keep calm, focused and safe on the way home.

7. ***Be prepared for the temperature***- Those bus rides can be really hot or really cold. That can throw you off and make a long ride very uncomfortable. But you can be prepared either with a jacket or a small portable fan. You can either have these in your back pack or arrange to have them available to you on right on the bus (your mom or dad may have to arrange this through your IEP or directly with the bus driver).

Using your "bus smarts" will help you conquer this difficult part of the day! If you have your own unique way of handling the bus ride, we would love to hear about it! Please share your tips by writing to: tracy@bpchildren.com