

Bus Safety Discussion Guide

In light of the bridge collapse

This year, lessons on bus safety may bring up questions and concerns from students about bridges. While it is not necessary to bring up the bridge collapse in Minneapolis at the start of the bus safety lesson, students may have questions or concerns of their own that they raise. If the discussion moves in that direction, here are some general guidelines to keep in mind.

As you prepare for the bus safety lesson with your students of any age, be aware that after hearing about or experiencing a disaster, trauma or dangerous situation, students are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be injured or killed.
- They will be separated from the family.
- They will be left alone.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. But as an adult, you need to:

- provide support,
- provide current, accurate information, and
- Make referrals to student support staff if a student seems too anxious or too focused on the incident.

In any discussion of disaster, students will look to you and other adults for help. How you as an educator react to their expressions of fear or anxiety in class gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm or discount their concerns, a child may become more scared or keep their fears to themselves and not be able to participate fully in learning.

Children's fears also may stem from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid *is afraid*. Even if there are no bridges within 20 miles of your school, children see and hear reports of the bridge collapse and may naturally spin out disastrous scenarios about "what if" in their heads.

Younger students do not have the ability to recognize a video replay of the bridge collapse as a replay of the same incident, and may therefore believe that many bridges have collapsed. Your words and actions can provide reassurance. When talking with students, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable.

Reviewing bus safety materials with an eye for student concerns gives educators the opportunity to address the concerns with clarifying information, to dispel rumors and to refer students if necessary. It also allows one to teach safety and empower students to take personal action by following the bus rules.

Positive action helps to counter fears. Remind students they are in charge of their own behavior and positive behavior helps promote bus safety. Everyone can take action on a bus every day to keep all riders safe.

Following the rules every trip helps to make sure that everyone will be safe in every way—physically and emotionally.

These suggestions are adapted from **Children and Their Response to Disaster**, a resource from the American Red Cross web site. For further Red Cross Resources, including their curricula, Masters of Disaster and Facing Fear (<http://www.redcross.org>).

Other Resources:

Behavioral Health resources for children, youth and the adults who work with them (<http://www.health.state.mn.us>). Behavioral Health and Emergency Preparedness: Resources from the Minnesota Department of Health *A range of mental health and chemical abuse (behavioral health) problems may surface in the early stages of an emergency situation. These may continue to emerge among the public and among professionals who respond to an event. Addressing these concerns improves the emergency response and the health of the whole community.*

Tips for Helping Student s Recover from Traumatic Events, U.S. Department of Education, 9/2005 (<http://www.ed.gov>), or call 877-433-7827. *Tips for parents, teachers and student support staff and others in an eleven page publication. Review and order from this web site or call the number above.*

The Minnesota Association for Pupil Transportation has numerous educational resources regarding bus safety and bus transportation policy (www.mnapt.org).

For further information, contact Nancy Riestenberg, Prevention Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education, nancy.riestenberg@state.mn.us, 651-582-8433.