

# KNOW THE RULES...

## When Your Child Is Traveling Unaccompanied by **BUS** or **TRAIN**

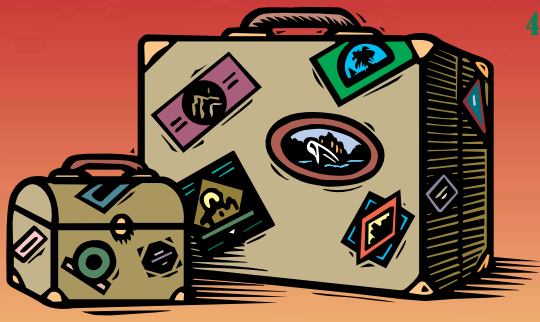


**A**ppropriate planning with bus or train lines and your child is the best way to guard against any potential unpleasant travel experiences and help ensure your child's safe journey from start to finish. To assist you in this process, it helps to know there are some consistencies among transportation providers. For instance Greyhound® and Amtrak®, the nation's primary bus company and passenger railroad respectively, do not allow children who are younger than the age of 8 to travel unaccompanied. Children younger than 8 must travel accompanied by a passenger who is at least 15 years old. While children who are 15 and older are considered adults and may travel unaccompanied as any adult would without restrictions, children between the ages of 8 and 14 may travel unaccompanied under the conditions noted below.

- Children may not transfer between buses, between trains, from a bus to a train, or from a train to a bus.
- The railroad stations at which your child begins and ends a trip must be staffed at the time of departure and arrival. The bus departure and arrival terminals must be open during both your child's departure and arrival, and an adult designated by you, the parent or guardian, must meet your child at the arrival terminal.
- Bus and train trips must be scheduled during daylight hours, and bus trips may not last more than 5 hours.
- Written permission must be obtained before your child is permitted to travel alone. A parent, guardian, legal custodian, or other trusted adult must take the child to the bus terminal or train station prior to departure to complete an "Unaccompanied Child Form." Children traveling by train must be interviewed by an authorized authority to determine if he or she may travel alone. The name, address, and telephone number of the trusted adult(s) meeting your child at the destination must be given. When picking up your child from the destination station the adult(s) listed on the form must present picture identification before your child will be released.
- In most cases, passengers 8 and older must pay a full adult fare when traveling by bus or train.

**The general rules noted below will help make the travel experience for your child safer and more enjoyable.**

1. When you make reservations or buy a ticket for your child, specify he or she will be traveling alone. Tickets may not be purchased online for unaccompanied minors. Make certain you are clear about the specific requirements for children traveling alone, ask for a written copy of the policies and procedures, and review them with your child.
2. When booking train travel, inquire about meal accommodations. Since dining and café cars may not be available or the food offered in them may not appeal to your child, be sure to pack a snack for the trip.<sup>1</sup> Because buses do not supply meal or beverage service onboard and meal stops are limited in both time and variety, be sure your child has convenient beverages and snacks for the trip. If your child has any life-threatening food allergies he or she will not be permitted to travel unaccompanied by train.
3. In most cases you will not be able to reserve specific seats on either the bus or train, so arrive at the terminal or station early. Try to secure a seat near the front of the bus where it may be easier for your child to see out the windows.<sup>2</sup> It may also be beneficial for your child to sit near the front of the bus in order to be closer to transit personnel if needing assistance.



4. As with any new experience, "practice makes perfect." Thus try to visit the bus terminal or train station prior to your child's trip. Take a tour of the area, introduce your child to some of the people working for the bus or train line, and explain the basics of the travel experience. Let your child know the types of things to expect. Instruct your child to follow general safety rules such as moving cautiously up and down the aisles while onboard for his or her safety. Advise your child that the bus or train personnel are the "helping adults" to look for when needing assistance; needing answers to questions; or feeling scared, uncomfortable, or confused by anything or anyone.
5. On the day of travel, at a minimum, arrive at the terminal or station at the suggested time prior to the departure of the bus or train. And with the nature of travel with a child, you may want to arrive even earlier. Be sure to allow enough time to fill out the mandatory paperwork and help ensure your child is settled. You must remain at the terminal or station until the bus or train leaves. Should a delay occur, your child will be much more comfortable in the waiting area with you than sitting aboard the bus or train. And if the trip is canceled or redirected, you want to be there to make alternative arrangements.
6. Check with the bus or train line to see what documentation parents or guardians must provide prior to a child being allowed to travel alone other than the necessary "Unaccompanied Child Form." Be prepared to show identification when you take your child to the station and advise the adult(s) picking up your child they must show identification in order to pick up your child. Make certain you have an alternate plan for the person(s) meeting the bus or train at the destination, in case they are delayed. Make certain your child knows the person he or she is traveling to meet, so an unfamiliar person does not meet him or her, and tell your child to never leave with anyone you have not authorized to pick up him or her.
7. Dress your child comfortably in layered clothing so he or she may adjust to various temperatures. A change of clothing is a good idea as well. Your child must have sufficient money for meals and incidental expenses. When you give your child spending money be sure to include coins.
8. Your child should travel lightly with a carry-on piece of luggage, possibly on wheels, or backpack that holds clothes and other essentials such as identification and medications. Your child's photo identification and medications should be put in an envelope for safekeeping inside the carry-on luggage or backpack. It's a good idea to pack wipes and hand sanitizer for your child since onboard restroom facilities may not be adequate. And your child may wish to take reading materials. But, since red caps and baggage handlers aren't always available, your child should take only what he or she is able to easily keep track of, lift, carry, and/or roll.
9. Children may use handheld video games, compact-disc players, portable televisions, and any other electronic devices if they use headphones and the equipment is not noisy or intrusive to other passengers. Consider giving your child a cellular telephone so if there is a delay or problem he or she may contact you. Cellular telephone use is allowed on both buses and trains. Please remind your children of cellular-telephone etiquette while around others.
10. Tell your child not to become too friendly with other passengers because these are people he or she doesn't know. As in any social situation it's OK for your child to be polite but restrained. Caution your child not to reveal any personal information about him- or herself to other passengers and to let transit personnel know if anyone bothers him or her.

<sup>1</sup>Lansky, Vicki. *Trouble-Free Travel with Children: Helpful Hints for Parents on the Go*. New York, New York: The Book Peddlers, 1996, page 112.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, page 114.

**1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**  
**www.missingkids.com**

Copyright © 2000 and 2010 National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. All rights reserved.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2009-MC-CX-K002 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® and 1-800-THE-LOST® are registered service marks of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. NCMEC Order #77.

