

The Last Word . . .

School-Wise Driving

School bells are ringing, and children are flocking to school—in buses, on bicycles and on foot. That adds up to extra hazards for motorists.

Slow down while driving through school zones. If you speed, you may not see children walking behind bushes or parked cars. Also, children's depth perceptions are not fully developed until they are 9 years old, so they can't accurately judge the distance or speed of your car. Their attention spans are short, so they may dart into the road unpredictably. Watch for crossing guards and children when making a right turn on red.

Speaking of crossing guards, treat them with the respect you'd show a member of your state's highway patrol. Obey their directions, because they are the law.

In school areas, **drive as closely as possible to the center line on a two-way street** to put as much room as you can between your car and the sidewalk or roadside. That way, even if a child unexpectedly tumbles off a bicycle, you are far enough away to react in time.

If you need to sound your horn as a warning, don't blast it continually. A loud noise behind children can scare them into unpredictable dashes. A light tap on the horn is sufficient to let a child know you are there.

Turning on your headlights while driving through school areas will also help kids see you coming.

Use extreme caution around buses. Know what the light signals on buses mean in your area, and know how far away you're required to stop. Be careful about taking off immediately after the lights go out, since children often dash to catch the bus before it pulls away. Do not pass a school bus when its stop signal is displayed.

Be alert and patient. The risk of having a traffic mishap increases at the end of the day. Drivers are tired after a long day at work, while children are excited to be out of school. **Keep your temper in check** at all times and watch out for the children. ■