School Travel Plans

Walking Bus Guide

Version 4: June 2008

School Travel Planning Initiative

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

Introduction...

In this guide, you will find everything you ever wanted to know about walking buses. The guide includes:

- A set of frequently asked questions (FAQ)
- A flowchart on organising walking buses
- A set of forms to send to parents, to help you organise your walking bus

You can also download our guide, "Walking and Cycling: Safe Route Selection", to help maximise safety on your walking bus (address at the bottom of this page).

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Acknowledgements

A big "thank you" to Fraserburgh North School, its pupils and its Walking Bus Team (pictured on the cover), whose experiences of the walking bus have helped to complete this guide.

For more information or further copies of this guide, please visit http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/information/travel_plan.asp

The Walking Bus: The Basics

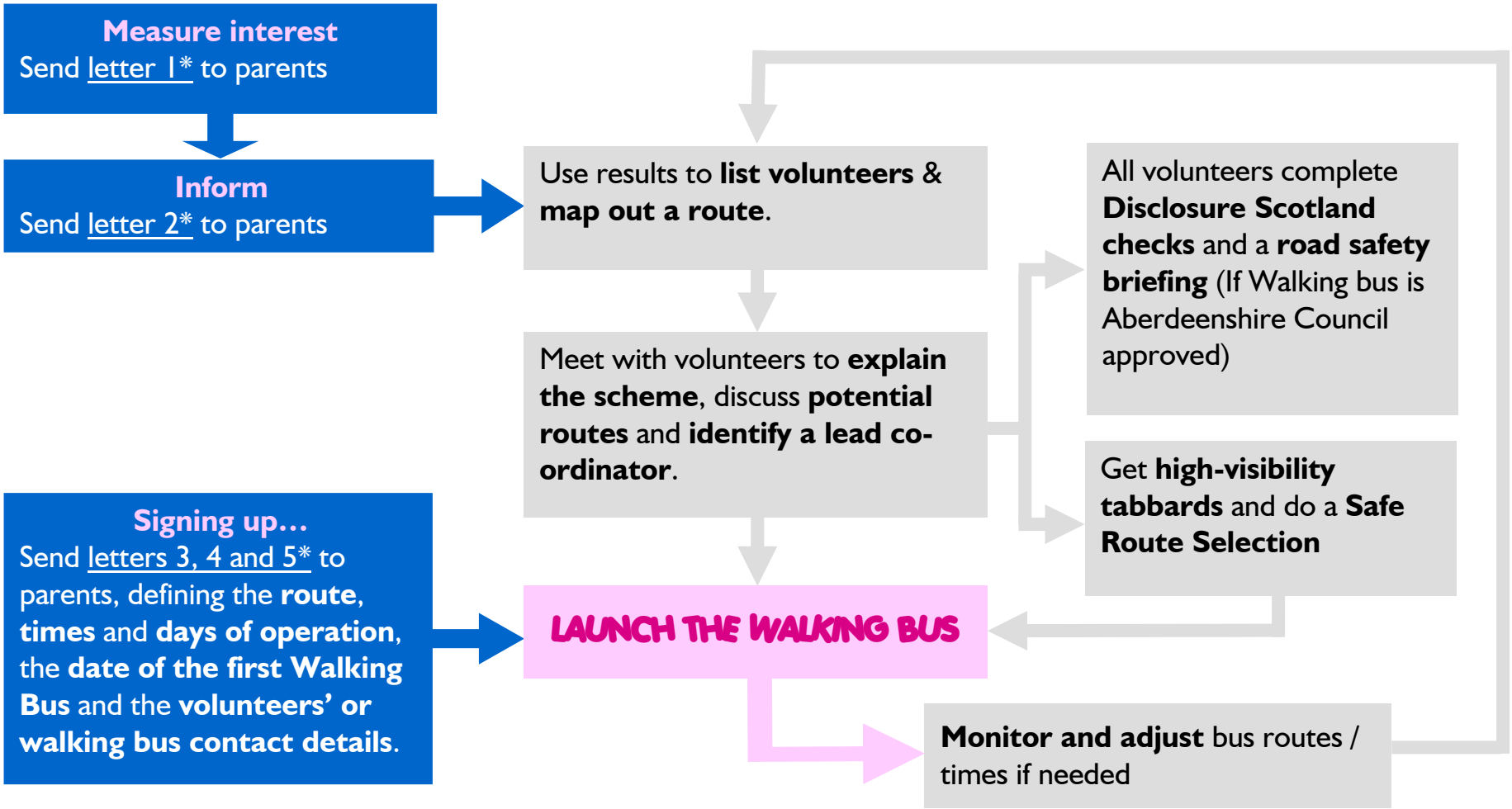
- A walking bus is an organised group of children walking on the school route, escorted by at least two adult volunteers: a 'driver', who leads the bus and a 'conductor', who brings up the rear of the bus. Depending on the number of children present, additional volunteer helpers are needed to keep a safe adult to child ratio (MINIMUM 1:4 for infants and 1:8 for older children).

- A walking bus travels along a set route, picking up and dropping off children at pre-agreed stops at times listed in a timetable. The route is set to meet parents' needs and kept to a length suitable for all ages of passengers. A safe route selection is carried out to maximise safety and all helpers are briefed on road safety issues.

- Benefits: children gain independence and learn road safety skills while exercising. A walking bus can help reduce car dependency and congestion, increasing children's safety at the school gates and improving the environment. There are benefits for parents too: as helpers can take turns to escort the bus, parents who are off-duty get extra time to get ready for work or relax while their children travel safely with the walking bus.

- Only children registered with the walking bus can use it, making sure that the 'driver' knows exactly who should be on it. Before a child can use the walking bus, each parent / guardian must complete a consent form (see form 4 at the end of this guide)

- Who's Who in a walking bus:
  - "Driver": the adult who walks at the front of the bus
  - "Conductor": the adult who walks at the back of the bus
  - "Helpers": people who make up minimum adult to child ratios (1:4 for infants, 1:8 for older children) on the bus
  - "Volunteers" – group name for the adult driver, conductor and helpers
  - "Lead Coordinator(s)": the person or people who are responsible for the organisation of the bus. The lead coordinator(s) can be involved in walking with the bus (driver or conductor or helper) but this is optional.
  - Other possible helpers include your STPO (School Travel Planning Officer), Road Safety Adviser, Active Schools Coordinator, Assistant Health Improvement Officer…



*See forms 1 to 5 at the end of this guide.

The Walking Bus: Frequently Asked Questions

- **What if children already walk to school?** They can still join in: the Walking Bus will allow them to meet friends on the way to school and give off-duty parents extra time in the morning; parents can also join the Walking Bus as volunteers.
- **What if children live too far to walk to school?** You could set up a 'park and stride', where parents meet at a designated place and form a walking bus to take children the rest of the way to school. This will reduce congestion at the school gate and give children and parents some exercise. Parents can also join the Walking Bus as helpers.
- **Does the bus run in bad weather and at the start of term?** The bus will run, even if it rains, on every day it is planned to run unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. school closures). If your walking bus is planned to run once a week in the morning, for example, it will have to run every week on that day until the end of the school year. The idea is to have a reliable bus!

VOLUNTEERS:

- **Who can volunteer to drive or conduct a Walking Bus?** Any adult known to the school - usually parents, but you can also try other groups like Scout Groups or Rotary Clubs for volunteers.
- **Are volunteers vetted?** If the bus is organised with or by the school, yes: every volunteer will complete a Disclosure Scotland form, which can be completed for free through the school. For more information, please visit www.disclosures.gov.uk or contact your STPO (details on the last page). If the bus is organised by the PTA or a parent group, it will be up to them to decide.
- **What do volunteers do?** Volunteers are responsible for guiding and supervising the Walking Bus. Each bus will have AT LEAST TWO volunteers (a driver and a conductor), who will stay with the bus at all times. Depending on the number of children on the bus, more volunteers are placed along the bus to help supervision. ONLY the driver and conductor are allowed to give directions and instructions; children and helpers must follow these instructions.
- **What road safety training is provided?** The Lead Co-ordinator will arrange for volunteers to receive a road safety briefing; speak to your STPO or Road Safety Adviser for more information.

- **What does the Lead Co-ordinator do?** The Lead Co-ordinator is responsible for:
  - Setting up and organising the walking bus,
  - Updating and distributing the Walking Bus register, the travel arrangements, the volunteer rota, as well as pupils' and volunteers' contact details.

  The Lead co-ordinator should not do all the work – ideally parents, volunteers and the school will work together – but is the first point of contact for any issues. He or she is responsible for making sure that new volunteers know their responsibilities and have been through the necessary checks before being added to the rota. The Lead Coordinator can also be a driver / conductor or helper if they wish.
- **If I volunteer will I need to run the Bus every day?** No – you will just need to take your turn, as the bus will run on a rota.
- **What happens if a volunteer unexpectedly cannot run the Walking Bus?** It is the volunteer's responsibility to find a replacement. All volunteers are given contact numbers for the other volunteers on their rota. You may want to have a central walking bus mobile phone, to keep with the register, that you can text or call.
- **What happens when a volunteer needs to be replaced?** Ideally, the volunteer who is leaving should find a replacement, but everybody involved in the Walking Bus needs to be constantly on the lookout for new volunteers.
- **How do parents keep up to date with changes to the volunteer rota etc.?** The Lead Co-ordinator will inform parents of important changes.

PASSENGERS & SAFETY:

- **From what age can children join the Walking Bus?** From about 4 years old.
- **How many children travel on the Walking Bus?** The ratio of adults to children is MINIMUM 1 to 8 for primary children and 1 to 4 for infants. The results of the risk assessment / Safe Route Selection may recommend that the ratio be reduced (i.e. fewer children per adult) if local dangers are apparent.
- **What does a volunteer do if a child misbehaves on the Walking Bus?** Children who misbehave or endanger anyone must be reported to the Head Teacher, who can then withdraw the child from the Walking Bus if necessary.
- **Who takes responsibility in the event of an accident?** Parents of children using the walking bus sign a form to show that they understand that they are responsible for their child's journey to school on the bus. Volunteers have a limited degree of personal accident cover when supervising the walking bus; the council's own legal liabilities are covered.

[Continued on the next page…]

There are **2 main options for insurance**:

1. If the walking bus is organised as a **volunteer group** with the school's consent, it will be covered by the council's insurance, so long as volunteers:

- Have obtained the go-ahead from Disclosure Scotland
- Are trained (road safety briefing)
- Wear high visibility clothing
- Follow minimum adult to pupil ratios (see above)

2. If the walking bus is organised by the **school's Parent-Teacher Association** (PTA), it will be covered by the PTA's insurance – the PTA have to notify their insurers of this.

Any accident or incident involving the Walking Bus must be reported to the Lead Co-ordinator, and entered in the school accident book if appropriate.

Is high-visibility clothing provided? High-visibility clothing (such as high-visibility waistcoats, tabbards or bibs) should be worn (MUST be worn, if the school or Aberdeenshire Council are involved) on the bus at all times and returned to the school when no longer used for the Walking Bus.

Aberdeenshire Council can lend out waistcoats for volunteers and children taking part for the first couple of weeks of bus operation. Once the bus is running regularly, the walking bus will need to get its own high-visibility clothing. We may be able to help with this (company sponsorship is sometimes possible), so please speak to your STPO or Road Safety Adviser for more information.

SETTING-UP AND OPERATION:

How is the walking route chosen? Addresses are collected from interested parents and plotted onto a map. The most appropriate route is then selected to best match parents' needs, whilst remaining of a length suitable for all ages of passengers.

The Lead Co-ordinator and helpers will assess the route chosen, suggest the best locations to cross roads and can make recommendations about stricter adult to child ratios along the route. They will, for example, identify locations for stops on wide pavements so that the Walking Bus can stop and wait safely without blocking other people's paths.

To help, we have produced a set of guidelines on safe route selection (see "Walking and Cycling: Safe Route Selection" on the School Travel Plans web page http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/information/travel_plan.asp) - but please feel free to ask for more help if you feel that you need it.

The chosen route is circulated to all volunteers, and made available to other interested parties.

- **What happens if the route needs to be changed?** The agreed route must be used at all times; if any section of an agreed route becomes unusable, the volunteers will select an appropriate alternative route to minimise risk. The volunteers must notify the Lead Co-ordinator of this.
- **Is there a timetable?** Yes: just like a normal bus, there is a strict timetable. Even if volunteers are expecting certain children to travel, they WILL NOT wait for latecomers, as this may mean that they would be late for other children.
- **Is there a register?** Yes: on every journey, the driver will check passenger names against that day's register; the school should be informed of any pupils who are missing (without explanation) from the bus. Pupils who fail to take the bus 3 times in a row without explanation are withdrawn from the walking bus and must re-register if they wish to come on the bus again.
- **Can children travel on the Bus on a casual basis?** No: child must be fully registered on the walking bus before they can use it. This makes sure that volunteers can guarantee minimum adult to children ratios.
- **What happens if a child is ill on the day of the walking bus?** A parent or guardian should inform one of the volunteers on duty that day. Alternatively, if the walking bus has a walking bus mobile, text or phone this number to inform the walking bus driver.
- **What happens if a child wants to change his / her Walking Bus days?** If the change is a one-off e.g. an absence due to a doctor's appointment, the child's parents must inform the relevant volunteer using the list of volunteers' contact details provided. If the change is long-term or permanent, parents must contact the Lead Co-ordinator in person to make the changes. Volunteers must not accept changes to the register that compromise the adult to child ratio.
- **What happens if a parent fails to collect a child from the stop after school?** If the parent has indicated on the application form that the child is allowed to walk home alone from the stop, the child can walk alone.

  If the child is NOT allowed to walk home alone, a volunteer will either take the child home with them and telephone the child's family (failing that, telephone the school or the Police) OR take the child to the child's home.

  The volunteer MUST inform the Head Teacher of the incident and reasons for it. The Head Teacher can remove the child from the bus if necessary.

WALKING BUSES: ADVICE TO PARENT GROUPS

A number of agencies / initiatives (Grampian Police's Road Safety Unit, School Travel Planning, Active Schools, and Health Improvement…), can support local schools to look at the feasibility of starting a Walking Bus (WB). A guide already exists to set out very clearly the procedures and practices related to WB; this can be found on www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schooltravelplan. However due to the experience of the group members organising Walking Buses in Aberdeenshire, it was felt to be useful to draw up a progress plan for parents groups, specifically stating stages for involvement of partner agencies.

1. Interest from Parent Group to start a WB at their school.

2. Request support from one / more of the initiatives so that, once you are ready, a member or members can attend a parent meeting to discuss the idea and ensure the parent groups have a copy of the WB Guide. Members of the initiatives will speak to each other to make sure that all the initiatives are aware of progress and able to contribute if, where and when required!

3. Parent / staff groups are expected to proceed as follows: -

- Gauge interest from pupils and parents to their usage of a WB (sample letter in WB Guide)
- Establish whether there is a likely group of volunteers – it is important to record their weekly availability and where they live. It is worthwhile ensuring that Disclosure Scotland checks will be carried out by the school in accordance with Aberdeenshire Council Policy
- A school area catchment map should be used to plot where interested children and volunteers live.
- A suggested route should be agreed – taking in to consideration school crossing patrols, refuse collection days, widths of parents etc.

4. Once all the above information has been gathered – invite someone from one of the relevant initiatives to a parent meeting. There are then two ways to proceed:

i. A formal, council-approved and insured WB takes longer to set up but ensures that all safety issues are considered.
ii. If you want to just try out a WB or run one informally, this will normally be quicker but you will have to decide whether you need to insure yourself against possible accidents. If it is a Parent Council or School-organised WB, check that the Parent Council's insurance will cover you.

5. Before you start a formal WB, you must:

- Ensure all adult volunteers have had a road safety brief, been approved by Disclosure Scotland and wear high-visibility clothing.
- Ensure that the chosen route has been risk-assessed and approved by Aberdeenshire Council.
- Respect Aberdeenshire Council policy on minimum adult to pupil ratios (1:4 for infants, 1:8 for adults.
- Ensure you have high-visibility vests / bibs for children on the WB.

The Walking Bus – Organisers' Checklist

You will need:

- At least 2 volunteers: a "driver" and a "conductor". ☐
- In total, enough adults to maintain a safe adult to child ratio (1 to 4 for infants, 1 to 8 for primary children). ☐
- A defined route, which has been selected to minimise risk ☐
- A timetable for your route, clearly defining what time the bus leaves from (or arrives at, if your bus runs at the end of the day) each stop ☐
- High-visibility clothing for all children (ideal in all cases and compulsory if the bus is Aberdeenshire Council or School-led). ☐
- Parent consent forms for all children going on the walking bus ☐
- Disclosure Scotland checks for all adult walking bus volunteers. ☐

You may also want to think about:

- A mobile phone that you can use as the main point of contact for parents and volunteers. You could just get a pay as you go SIM card to use JUST for the bus. ☐
- Passes for children to have to show that they are on the walking bus; these passes would carry the school's name and phone number as well as the walking bus mobile number, if you have one. When children leave school or stop taking the bus, they simply return their pass to the school. ☐
- Doing an initial walking bus assembly is a good way of getting children interested; they can then encourage their parents to sign them up to the bus or volunteer to help. ☐
- Giving each walking bus passenger a certificate to show that they have taken part. ☐
- Doing an official launch and publicising this in the newspapers; it will give your bus a higher profile and ensure that your community is aware of the bus, which will help to maximise safety. ☐

MEASURING INTEREST FOR A WALKING BUS.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are thinking of setting up a 'walking bus' to reduce traffic around the school and improve pupils' road safety skills, fitness and knowledge of their local environment.

WHAT IS A WALKING BUS? It is an organised group of children walking on the school route, escorted by at least two adults: a 'driver', who leads the bus and a 'conductor', who brings up the rear of the bus. More volunteers are added for larger groups.

HOW DOES IT WORK? A walking bus travels along a set route, picking up / dropping off children at pre-agreed stops at times listed in a timetable. The route is set to meet parents' needs and kept to a length suitable for all ages of passengers. The route will be assessed for safety and volunteer parents will receive training.

WHEN WILL IT OPERATE? The walking bus can operate every school day or only on certain days, depending on parents' interest and volunteer numbers.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS? Children not only develop better road safety and pedestrian skills but also arrive at school awake and alert. The walking bus provides children with good exercise and a chance to discover their local environment. It is fun, as children can meet friends on the way to school. The walking bus will also help to reduce congestion and pollution around the school.

Please let us know whether how you would feel about a walking bus at our school by filling in the form below and returning it by _____DATE_____.

Yours sincerely,

TEACHER
SCHOOL NAME

Please complete this form and return it to the school by__DATE__.

Name of Child / Children _____ Class _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Address (including postcode) _____

_____

_____

How does your child usually travel to school? Walk / Cycle / Car / Bus / Other

Would your child(ren) use the walking bus if we had a suitable route? Yes / No / Maybe

Would you be willing to act as 'driver' or 'conductor'? Yes / No / Maybe

INFORMATION MEETING ON OUR WALKING BUS

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We recently sent out information on the possibility of setting up a walking bus; we are pleased to report that we have had a good response to this and are continuing with this project.

We are now planning to hold a meeting to provide you with further information on our Walking Bus and offer you the chance to ask questions about the scheme. The meeting will take place on __D A T E__ at __T I M E__ and last for approximately 30 minutes.

We hope that you will be able to attend; however, if you are not able to attend but are still interested in the scheme – either as a volunteer or as a parent whose child would take part in the scheme – and would like further information, please complete the slip below and return it to the school.

The success of the walking bus will depend on your enthusiasm and willingness to become involved, so please take the opportunity to volunteer if you are interested.

Yours Sincerely,

TEACHER
SCHOOL NAME

If you are unable to attend but wish to help, please complete this form and return it to the school

Name of Child / Children _____ Class _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Name of Parent _____

Address (including postcode) _____

_____

_____

Are you willing to be a volunteer for the scheme? Yes / No / Maybe

Would you like further information about the scheme? Yes / No

Would your child use the walking bus if we had a suitable route? Yes / No / Maybe

Launch of our walking bus

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Thank you to everyone who participated in our walking bus information meeting; we are now ready to set up the walking bus. Our first walking bus will depart on D A T E , and run for X DAYS / WEEKS.

The Route will be as follows:

TO school	Designated Stop	Time leaving from stop	Volunteers
			Monday:
			Tuesday:
			Wednesday:
			Thursday:
			Friday:

FROM school	Designated Stop	Time arriving at stop	Volunteers
			Monday:
			Tuesday:
			Wednesday:
			Thursday:
			Friday:

If you would like your child to join the walking bus, please **complete and return**:

- The enclosed consent form
- The Parent's and Child's Promises form

to the school by D A T E .

The children will be provided with fluorescent bibs to wear on the walking bus; these will be collected and stored at school during the day and then given back to the children for the journey home. All our volunteers, who have been trained and obtained Criminal Records Bureau disclosure checks, will also wear fluorescent bibs.

The success of the walking bus will depend on your enthusiasm and willingness to become involved. We still welcome new volunteers, so please contact the Lead Co-ordinator (N A M E) if you wish to participate. The future of the walking bus depends on the success of this trial.

Yours Sincerely,

TEACHER
SCHOOL NAME

Walking Bus Consent Form

PLEASE COMPLETE ONE FORM PER CHILD

Child's Name _____ Class _____

- Will join the Walking Bus (please tick all boxes that apply)

Monday	☐ Morning	☐ Afternoon
Tuesday	☐ Morning	☐ Afternoon
Wednesday	☐ Morning	☐ Afternoon
Thursday	☐ Morning	☐ Afternoon
Friday	☐ Morning	☐ Afternoon

- Will join and leave the bus at _____
- Special Medical Needs _____

- I realise that my child's journey to school is still my responsibility even though they will be using the walking bus.
- I will make sure that my child is at the stop at the listed time and that they wear the high-visibility clothing provided while on the walking bus.
- I will make sure that my child is collected from the stop on the return journey home either by myself or a designated person, detailed below.
- I have read the guidelines and explained to my child the need for good behaviour.

Parent/Guardian's name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

_____

Address _____

Telephone numbers Home _____ Work _____ Mobile _____

Name of person collecting your child **if not you**

Telephone numbers Home _____ Work _____ Mobile _____

Please give details of an alternative contact if the child's parent / guardian cannot be contacted:

Name _____ Telephone number _____

Relationship to child _____

Walking Bus Parent & Child Promise

Parent's Promise

I promise I have:

- Talked to my child about road safety on the walking bus
- Made sure that my child understands how the bus operates
- Made sure my child knows where the afternoon stop is
- Made sure that my child knows what is expected of him / her
- Made sure that my child knows what days they are travelling
- Discussed with my child what to do if things go wrong e.g.
  - ☹ He / she misses the bus
  - ☹ He / she is not met as expected at the stop after school
- Agreed to contact the bus co-ordinator if my details change

I am aware that I am responsible for:

- Ensuring that my child arrives at the walking bus stop on time
- Ensuring that my child gets to school if they miss the walking bus
- Ensuring that I, or a designated person, is waiting at the stop to collect my child after school.
- Informing the school / co-ordinator if my child will not be using the walking bus

Child's Promise

When I join the walking bus I promise to:

- Behave sensibly all the time
- Obey the instructions given by the bus driver and conductor
- Wear the fluorescent jacket I will be given
- Walk in a pair where possible
- Remember to **STOP, LOOK, LISTEN** and **THINK** when I am near roads
- Look after my own safety and not cause danger to others
- Always travel on the walking bus on the days I am expected to
- Arrive on time at the stop, before AND after school, when I am using the bus

Parent's / Guardian's Name _____ Signature _____

Child's Name _____ Signature _____

Date _____

Aberdeenshire Walking Buses – Emergency Card

Knowing what to do in an emergency can save a life. If you are in an emergency situation, always **stay calm, make sure everyone (including you) is safe and reassure the casualty**. If the situation is serious, call 999 as soon as possible and ask for help.

Nosebleed – can happen suddenly but are easy to treat and aren't usually serious.

- Small nosebleed: **Sit** them down and get them to **lean forward; reassure** them, ask them to **breathe through their mouth** and **pinch the soft part of their nose** for ten minutes
- If bleeding doesn't stop after ten minutes: **pinch the nostrils again** for two further periods of ten minutes
- If nosebleed is severe or doesn't stop after 30 minutes CALL 999

Cut, graze or bleeding – Most small cuts and grazes are easy to treat. In more serious cases (big or deep cuts, cuts to the head), there might be lots of blood. Severe bleeding can be dramatic and distressing.

- Small cut or graze: At school, ask the **first-aider to clean and check** the cut and put on a sticky plaster
- Medium cut: (up to than 1cm deep or long):
  - If there is nothing in the cut, ask the person to **press on it with their hand**, and put the cut **above their heart**. Take the person **straight to school to the first aider**.
  - If there is an object in the cut, **do not press on it**; take the person **straight to school to the first aider**.
- Large cut or severe blood loss CALL 999

Sprain / Strain – Sprains affect joints; strains affect muscles. Limb is tender, swollen, bruised or twisted with sharp pain; person finds their limb hard to move

- **Rest** – Sit down; support the hurt limb, **Cool** – apply something cold if you can (e.g. cold water on a hankie), **Call school** to contact parents
- If a bone might be fractured or broken: see below and CALL 999

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- If a bone might be fractured or broken: see below and CALL 999

Fractured / Broken bone – Limb can be swollen, bruised, bent or twisted. Bone is sometimes seen as a bump under or popping out (open break) through skin

- Keep the limb still, get the person to rest and make sure everyone is safe. Reassure the person and CALL 999

Asthma attack – can cause: difficult breathing or tiredness from trying to breathe; wheezing or dry cough; distress and anxiousness; grey / blue skin. Lots of things can set off asthma; attacks can be mild to very serious.

- If this is their first attack: reassure them, help them to relax, CALL 999
- If the person has asthma medication: help them to take it. If the inhaler has no effect CALL 999
- If the attack is severe CALL 999

Diabetic emergency – only a problem for diabetic people; there are two different types: High blood sugar can cause thirst, vomiting, fruity/sweet breath and a rapid, weak pulse. Low blood sugar can cause hunger, feeling 'weak' and confused, sweating, dry, pale skin and shallow breathing.

- High and low blood sugar can be hard to tell apart and doing the wrong thing could be dangerous. If there is a diabetic emergency, call the parents / guardians; if these cannot be reached, CALL 999. Keep the person resting.

Fits / Epileptic fits – can cause convulsive movements (clenched jaw, rigid body), hot / flushed skin and sudden fainting. In children, fits are usually caused by fever. Epileptic fits can be minor or major.

- A minor epileptic fit may cause blankness, twitching limbs and the person might make strange noises e.g. smacking lips. Sit person down, reassure them and make sure they are safe
- A major epileptic fit may cause sudden fainting, convulsive movements (clenched jaw, rigid body); the person might stop breathing. Protect person from their surroundings to avoid them getting hurt (especially near their head); give them space and CALL 999. Allow the fit to finish and make sure the person is safe; reassure them and check they are OK.

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For more information, please contact your

School Travel Planning Officer at:

Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I)
Aberdeenshire Council
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen
AB16 5GB

Phone: 01224 664781