

Dear bus driver and bus monitor,

I wanted to take a minute to share with you the impact you have on our family. First, my child riding your bus has had anything but a normal life. He was neglected, abused, traumatized, and now we are doing everything we can to help him overcome his previous trauma. He is diagnosed with RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder). “If a child is not attached—does not form a loving bond with the mother—he does not develop an attachment to the rest of mankind. The unattached child literally does not have a stake in humanity” (Magid & McKelvey 1988).

We are working closely with an adoption/attachment specialist using therapeutic interventions. We are exhausted and trying to make sure everyone that comes into contact with my child sees the necessity to help with these interventions.

First and foremost, my child is very confused. People, that were supposed to be meeting his needs from conception, ended up hurting him. Therefore, while everyone else was learning to trust and learning to rely on their mother and father, my child was trying to survive. He learned to depend only on himself. Therefore, loving us, his forever family, is very difficult. We are hugging him lots to fill him up. Outside of the house, he is seeking attention and affection from others to “fill his cup.” This looks like him trying to hug you, get your attention, get you to show him attention, loving you through his words, etc. However the only thing that can fill his cup is learning to trust his family that has chosen to help him heal. The way that you can help facilitate this is to facilitate the following behaviors on the bus:

1) -have very limited physical contact with my child in the exception his safety is compromised. This includes but is not limited to hugs (front and side). You are more than welcome to give him high fives, fist bumps, etc.

2) –avoid answering questions. His pathological need for control manifests in questioning. If you are giving him attention and answering his questions then he is gaining control and not feeling safe. Turn the answers towards me, his parent. For instance, when he asks if there is school tomorrow, tell him to ask Mom/Dad. When he asks about specifics about other children on the route, tell him “Your parent knows all about the children on this bus. He/she has deemed this a safe place for you, so just sit back and enjoy your ride.”

3) – talk about us as parents as much as you can. At home, we are meeting his needs emotionally and physically. However, due to the previous trauma, he doesn’t believe it. You can play a huge role in this by giving him words of affirmation. Tell him his new shoes are perfect and that his parents bought him exactly what he needs. Remind him daily his Mom and Dad are super awesome people whom are meeting his every need. I know this sounds trivial to most, but the end result is that he will hear it from strangers better than hearing it from me.

4) -speak to me as the mother/father every single day as if we are best friends. I'll appear to be crazy most days, and most days I'm one decision short of having to commit myself in this journey to heal my child. When you see me, praise me in front of my son, talk about how good it is to see me, how loving and caring I am. Believe me, another situation of a child hearing it from an outsider and maybe, just maybe, it will sink in. I need to be informed of any misbehavior my child has done on your bus so I can help. He will see us as a team working together to help him heal and feel safer.

5) -quiet is very healing for my child. If he chatters all the way to school he will be more likely to have a bad day in class. If he chatters all the way home he is more likely to have a rough evening with the whole family. He lies. As he makes things up and tells them he just gets sicker and sicker. When adults believe his lies he feels like they are stupid and not trustworthy so he does not feel safe. When he does not feel safe he acts out. Have him sit quietly on your bus so he can think about his school-work or plan his day or just relax.

In the world of a child diagnosed with RAD, I often remind providers that the only thing we cannot fix in this journey is a child sensing discourse or animosity between adults. If you ever don't understand, don't know what to do, or want to talk, make sure it is done away from my child. If he senses one miniscule spot of disagreement, he will use that against me as his mother. Don't ever hesitate to ask, call, text, etc.

Thank you for being an integral part of my child's healing. YOU make a difference in the childrens' lives and I appreciate all you do!

Written by: Awesome Mom and Parent Advocate for parents to copy and use to help heal their challenging children.