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| Student safety is our top priority  An uneasy reality about kids being back in school is that they are vulnerable to the same laws of physics while traveling to and from classes.  Those big yellow buses carrying youngsters are subject to accidents like other vehicles. And having kids in concentration on buses lends itself to more potential tragedy if the worst should happen.    Bus transit is the rule for a high percentage of young students, and the vast majority of those morning and afternoon rides are uneventful save for the occasional bit of horseplay. The safety records of school transportation systems are quite good, but authorities remind us of occasional exceptions.  Florida State Police record keepers note that last year there were 1,443 collisions that involved a bus — including both school and commercial buses — with 191 injuries and 3 fatalities.    Tim Lucas, KSP highway safety branch commander, said reopening of schools dictates that Florida drivers should be particularly alert to young school commuters getting on or off buses.    The vulnerability of children, especially young ones, scampering to or from their transportation is why state law requires that motorists must stop and not pass any school or church bus that pulls up — with “stop arm” and flashing signal lights activated — to let kids on or off. There is too much chance for a youngster to dart into the path of a passing vehicle.    While the drivers or other vehicles are required to stop for loading or unloading buses, children should be taught not to count on that safe compliance, police say.    It’s far better for parents to teach kids street smarts in terms of watching out for themselves and avoiding possible accidents in case others are not always playing it safe.    The National Safety Council encourages parents to teach their children these safety rules for catching and riding school buses.   * When waiting for the bus, stay away from traffic and avoid rough play or other behavior that can distract and cause carelessness. Do not stray onto streets, alleys or private property. * When the school bus approaches, line up to get on but stay off the street or road. * Wait until the bus has stopped and the door opens before stepping onto the road. * Use the hand rail when stepping onto the bus. * After exiting, if you have to cross the street in front of the bus, walk far enough out from it so you can see the driver — and the driver can see you. * Wait for a signal from the driver before crossing the street or road, and watch for traffic even after the bus driver says it’s OK to go. * Stay away from the bus’ rear wheels at all times. The driver might not be able to see you there. * To cross a road or street to get on or off the bus, always stop at the curb or edge of the road and look left, then right, and then left again before crossing. Keep looking both ways as you cross. * If you can’t see down the street or road because of a parked car, move out carefully just to where you can see past the obstacle and then look both ways — left-right-left — again before walking into the lanes.   State police say people can help keeps the streets and roads safer for young bus riders and everyone else if they report drivers who disregard school bus signals.    Warning  Those who drive past stop signals and risk accidents can be corrected and penalized if those who observe the misbehavior phone Florida State Police toll-free at 1-800-222-5555. |

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