



## Bus Counselor Handbook



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## Our Transportation Commitment

Camp Playland proudly provides door-to-door transportation throughout Fairfield County and surrounding towns. Safe, reliable transportation is an essential part of the Camp Playland experience. We partner with **First Student** buses and **Connecticut Transport Solutions (CTS)** to ensure dependable service. All vehicles are operated by licensed, professional drivers.

Most campers travel to and from camp by bus or van, while some families choose to provide their own transportation. Every bus or van is assigned at least one Camp Playland counselor to act as a “Bus Counselor.”

As a Bus Counselor, you play a vital role in each camper’s day and your actions help shape their overall camp experience. Camp begins the moment a camper steps onto the bus or van and ends when they safely exit at the end of the day. Bus Counselors create a positive and welcoming atmosphere. Each bus should feel like a small Camp Playland community — where campers feel comfortable, included, and excited to ride each day.

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*“From the first ‘Good Morning!’ to the last drop-off smile — Camp Playland magic starts with YOU!”*

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## Role of the Bus Counselor

Bus counselors must be friendly, patient, and enthusiastic. Your interactions with families help shape their overall impression of Camp Playland.

Keep conversations with parents brief and positive. Any concerns, complaints, or disciplinary matters must be referred to a director. Bus counselors should never promise consequences or discuss confidential matters with families.

Your conduct, tone, and leadership set the atmosphere on the bus each day. Lead by example and create a safe, welcoming, and upbeat environment for every camper.

## Types of Bus Counselors

*Both roles carry the same expectations for safety and professionalism.*

### 1) Lead Bus Counselor

- In charge of the bus or van , overseeing all bus procedures.
- Manages attendance, GPS trackers, and medications
- Clearly communicates directly with camp administration
- Works with bus/van driver to let them know about absent campers

## 2) General Bus Counselor

- Assists with daily transportation duties
- Supports the Lead Counselor
- Engages campers and help them have a fun ride to and from camp

## Daily Responsibilities

Bus Counselors must be ready and waiting at their assigned pick-up location each morning. They are expected to be prepared and outside before your scheduled pick-up time.

If the bus has not arrived at the scheduled time, contact the Camp Office immediately. Punctuality is critical. If the start time is delayed, the entire bus route will fall behind schedule.

Bus counselors must work cooperatively with the driver. The driver is responsible for operating the vehicle safely and communicates with the bus depot via radio. Bus counselors must have a charged cell phone available for emergencies. The bus driver is responsible for knowing the route. Bus counselors should try to learn it too. Your familiarity with the route is helpful in case there is a substitute driver.

## Morning Routine

Camp will text lead bus counselors between 7:30am-8:30am to inform them if any campers are absent or not taking the bus. Lead bus counselors will communicate this information with the driver.

## Greeting Campers

- The Lead Bus Counselor will step off the bus at each stop.
- Greet every camper by name.
- Be friendly, polite, and attentive — you represent Camp Playland.
- Create a welcoming start to the day.
- SMILE! *“When adults smile, kids feel safe, seen, and ready to shine.”*

## Seating / Seat Belts

- Assist campers in finding appropriate seats.
- Reserve front seats for Pre-K and Kindergarten campers.
- Help with car seats and booster seats as needed.
- Ensure every camper is properly buckled before the bus moves.
- Counselors must wear seat belts at all times.

## Staying on Schedule

- The bus route lists pick-up times. If a camper is not at the stop in the morning, wait a few minutes

past the scheduled time and then continue on the route. Text or call camp with updates or concerns.

- If you arrive at a stop early, you must wait at the stop until the written time.

## **When Buses and Vans Arrive at Camp**

- The bus will first stop at the Pre-K Area where the Bears, Cheetahs, Grizzlies, Bengals, Lions and Tigers will disembark.
- The bus will continue to the pavilion where all other campers will get off the bus. Once parked in front of the pavilion, ensure all campers exit safely.
- Perform a full vehicle sweep:
  - Walk to the back of the bus or van.
  - Check every seat.
  - Confirm no campers remain onboard.
  - Check for backpacks or personal belongings left behind.
- Lead Bus Counselors must exit last and place the bus tracker in the designated basket on the front table of the picnic pavilion.
- Bring any medication to the nurse's office or give it to one of the directors.
- Report any issues or concerns to a director immediately.

## **Afternoon Routine**

### **Dismissal & Boarding**

After Flag Lowering, bus counselors will be called to a cone labeled with your bus number, placed along the perimeter of the ball field. You will line up in descending order (Bus 43, 42, 41, 40,.....1). Lead Bus Counselors will be given an attendance list for the way home. When they have an accurate count of campers, walk them to the van/bus. Pre-K campers (Cheetahs, Grizzlies, Lions, Tigers, Bears, Bengals) will meet you at the bus or van.

### **Attendance**

Take attendance once on the bus and give the thumbs up to the staff member assigned to check your vehicle. Take your time. Your bus attendance prior to exiting camp is critical. .

- The bus does not leave until:
  - Every camper on every bus is accounted for
  - Everyone is properly seated and buckled
  - A Director gives the official "all clear"

## Drop-Off Procedures

- Release campers only to an authorized parent/guardian.
- Never leave a camper unattended
- If no authorized adult is present:
  - Call the camp immediately.
  - Administration will contact the parent/guardian.
  - If parent or guardian cannot be reached you will continue on your route and keep the camper on the bus or van. A parent or guardian will pick up the child at another stop. The camp will be in communication with you and keep you updated.

## First Day of Each Session

- Make sure the campers know the bus counselors name and what bus number they ride. Be emphatic. The faster campers learn this the easier dismissal is.
- Lead Bus Counselors will be given a bus folder with your route and camper name tags for the first day. Please help campers with placing their nametag on before arriving at camp.

## Bus Safety

Every person riding the bus or van must wear a seat belt at all times. **No one — including counselors — may eat on the bus.** This policy prevents choking and protects campers with allergies.

Bus drivers and counselors may not stop the bus for a camper to use the bathroom. If a camper says they need to go, encourage them to try to hold it until arrival at camp or their scheduled stop.

If the situation becomes urgent, use discretion and maintain the camper's dignity. Provide a towel or appropriate covering to place over the camper's lap if needed. In the event of a bathroom accident, notify the camp office. The camp will contact the parents directly and provide further guidance.

*Why? Buses do not stop for bathroom breaks because staff should never take campers into public restrooms. This policy is in place to ensure camper safety, counselor safety and proper supervision at all times. Ask campers prior to leaving camp if they need to use the bathroom*

## What's NOT allowed on the bus?

1. Cell phones, tablets, or other electronic devices unless approved by the camp
2. Food or drinks of any kind
3. Toys with cords, strings, or sharp edges
4. Any item that could distract the driver or cause injury during the ride

If a camper needs a fidget toy or something to keep them occupied during the ride let directors know.

## GPS Trackers

Lead bus counselors on yellow school buses will be responsible for GPS trackers. Please put these in the basket in the pavilion upon arrival each morning. The tracker will be handed to you with your bus attendance at the end of the day. Please remember the tracker each morning as you leave your home.

## Booster Seats and Car Seats

Some parents may request a booster seat or car seat for their child. During orientation, you will be trained on how to properly secure campers in these seats. You will also receive a list identifying the campers who require either a booster seat or a car seat.

Booster Seat



Car Seat



Built in Bus Car Seat



## Medical Needs

Some campers require an EpiPen or other medication on the bus. Lead Bus Counselors assigned to routes with campers who require EpiPens will receive additional instruction at orientation.

In the morning, the parent will hand the EpiPen or medication directly to the bus counselor. Upon arrival at camp, the medication must be delivered immediately to the Nurse's Office.

In the afternoon, the EpiPen will be returned to the Lead Bus Counselor along with attendance and the GPS tracker. The EpiPen must be handed to the parent at drop-off. Never give medication to campers.

If an EpiPen is administered, 911 must be called immediately. After contacting emergency services, notify the camp office.

## Behavior Management

The bus is an extension of Camp Playland. All camp behavior policies apply during transportation. Establish simple, clear rules that help campers travel safely and enjoy the ride. Always communicate expectations in a positive way by telling campers what to do, not what not to do.

For example, say: “Please use a quiet voice when riding the bus so everyone can enjoy the ride” instead of “Don’t yell.” Other positive examples:

- “Keep your hands and belongings to yourself” instead of “Don’t touch others.”
- “Keep the aisle clear and your feet on the floor” instead of “Don’t block the aisle.”
- “Use kind words if there’s a problem” instead of “No arguing.”

Positive language sets clear expectations, reduces confrontation, and promotes a calm, respectful bus environment.

Correct campers individually and privately whenever possible. Embarrassing a camper in front of peers is not acceptable. Practice patience. Structure the bus ride to prevent problems by engaging campers in organized, appropriate activities.

General bus counselors should defer discipline concerns to the Lead Bus Counselor. If behavior escalates or becomes unsafe, contact the camp office. A Director will determine appropriate next steps and communicate with parents if necessary.

Under no circumstances should a counselor physically restrain a camper.

Bus counselors should communicate only positive messages to parents during daily interactions. If you have concerns about a camper’s behavior, speak with one of the directors. A director will address the concern directly with the parent and camper.

## Behavior Management Strategies

*Even though you are not on the Camp Playland campus, the directors and administrative team are always available to support you. You are never alone. We are all working together to ensure every camper gets home safely and enjoys a safe, positive ride. At every step, remember that you are part of a team committed to one shared goal: safety, teamwork, and a great experience for our campers.*

### 1. Address Behavior Early and Calmly

Try to anticipate the behavior before it happens! Use proximity — sit near the camper. Give a calm, direct reminder: “John, I need you facing forward and staying seated and buckled.”

Avoid yelling across the bus and do your best to correct in a calm voice

Why it works: Calm authority reduces power struggles. Early correction prevents escalation.

### 2. Reinforce Positive Behavior More Than You Correct Negative Behavior

Catch campers being good and publicly praise positive behavior, i.e. “Mike, I appreciate how you are sitting safely and having fun with John.” Use simple incentives (bus points for most spirit). Thank cooperative campers individually

Why it works: Positive attention drives behavior. Kids repeat what gets noticed.

### 3. Never Make It Personal

Correct the behavior — not the child. Instead of: “You’re always causing problems,” say: “That behavior isn’t safe on the bus.”

*“A calm counselor creates a calm bus.”*

## Bus Games and Engagement

An engaged bus prevents behavioral problems and helps make the ride FUN! Below are games for all ages that don’t require equipment. You can find a lot more games like this online!

### Call-and-Response Games

- Repeat After Me
- Bus Cheer (create one for your bus number!)
- Echo Clap
- Count to 20 Around the Bus

### Thinking & Word Games

- I Spy
- 20 Questions
- Alphabet Game
- Categories
- Would You Rather (clean versions)
- Rhyme Time
- Name That Sound

### Seated Energy Games

- Laugh Chain
- Pass the Face
- Freeze Face
- Silent Ball (no throwing — gestures only)

### Music Games

- Song Chain
- Finish the Lyric
- Camp Song Medley

- Sound Effects Song

## Imagination Games

- One-Word Story
  - What Am I?
  - If I Were...
  - Magic Backpack (memory game)
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## Quick Thinking Games

### This or That (Rapid Fire)

Counselor gives two choices quickly (Beach or Pool? Cats or Dogs? Pancakes or Waffles?)  
Campers raise hands or vote by row.

### Three Clues

Counselor gives three clues about an object. Campers guess what it is.

### Five Second Rule

Name 3 ice cream flavors in 5 seconds!

Name 3 animals that live in water!

Fast-paced and fun.

### Odd One Out

Say 4 items — campers guess which one doesn't belong and why.

### Fact or Fiction

Counselor says a statement. Campers vote if it's true or false.

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## Group Participation Games

### Bus Shout-Outs

Campers give positive shout-outs to someone on the bus.

### Compliment Chain

Each camper gives a kind compliment to the next person.

### Row Challenge

Each row answers a question. Keep score for fun (no prizes needed).

## Team Bus Trivia

Split the bus into two sides. Ask simple camp or fun trivia questions.

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## Memory Games

### I'm Going to Camp and I'm Bringing...

Memory alphabet game. Each camper repeats previous items and adds one.

### Number Memory

Counselor says 3 numbers. Campers repeat. Add one more each round.

### Pattern Builder

Clap-clap-snap. Next camper repeats and adds one move.

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## Silly (But Controlled) Games

### No Smiling Challenge

Campers try not to smile while counselor tries to make them laugh (no touching).

### Emotion Switch

Counselor calls out an emotion — campers make that face instantly.

### Robot Mode

Everyone answers questions like a robot for one minute.

### Slow Motion Talk

Everyone talks in slow motion for 30 seconds.

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## Quiet Energy Games

### Hum That Tune

Counselor hums a song — campers guess.

### Volume Control Game

Counselor raises hand = louder

Lowers hand = quieter

Closed fist = silent

(Helps train bus volume control!)

Sound Wave

First camper makes a sound. It travels down the bus changing slightly each time.

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## Observation Games (Great for Longer Routes)

License Plate Spotting

Find different states.

Red Car / Blue Car Count

Count specific colored cars.

Construction Count

How many construction cones can you find?

Animal Watch

Look for dogs, birds, squirrels, etc.

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## Team-Building Games

Would You Survive?

You're stuck on a desert island — what 3 things would you bring?

Superpower Pick

If you could have one superpower for a day, what would it be?

Build a Camp Mascot

Each camper adds one feature to create a silly imaginary mascot.

Camp Dream Day

Each camper adds one activity to create the ultimate camp schedule.

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## Extra Games for Younger Campers (Pre-K–Grade 2)

Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes (Seated Version)

What Color Is It? (Find colors on the bus)

Animal Guessing (Counselor makes animal movement seated)  
Counting Around the Bus by 2s or 5s

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## Extra Games for Older Campers (Grades 3–6+)

Would You Rather: Camp Edition  
Sleep outside all summer or swim every day?

Debate Minute  
Is pizza better than burgers?  
Keep it light and fun.

Mystery Counselor Facts  
Guess which staff member matches the fact.

If You Know, You Know  
Camp inside jokes trivia.

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## Calm-Down / Reset Activities

Sometimes the bus needs to reset energy:

Silent Minute Challenge  
Can the bus stay silent for 60 seconds?

Deep Breath Countdown  
5 slow breaths together.

Eyes Closed Listening Game  
What sounds do you hear?