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## Why Do I Let My Kid Take The School Bus Without A Seatbelt?

**BY JOSEPH WILSON**

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“Hey Dad, how come we don’t wear seatbelts on the school bus?” My daughter asked me one day after school.

“Um, because ... it’s so big,” I said.

She eyed me. “That doesn’t make sense.”

She’s right. It doesn’t make sense. I would never think of moving my car an inch without my daughter firmly belted into her booster seat. On the school bus, though, she slides back on forth on the vinyl seat like it’s an inner tube on a water slide.

Naturally, she thinks it's great fun; it's an exhilarating departure from a day that is usually carefully scrubbed of unnecessary risk

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/school-bus-seatbelts-1.4826500>).

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My daughter first stepped onto the school bus when she was four years old. It was her first day of kindergarten and, like most parents, I was a nervous wreck. In a move described by friends as “creepy” and “classic helicopter,” I followed the bus to the school in a car share to make sure she got where she was supposed to go.

The bus driver, as it turned out, had never been to the school before and ended up on the wrong street. He was in his early twenties, with little experience navigating the many one-way streets of Toronto.

There was little incentive for him to practice on the weekend: he was getting paid little more than minimum wage (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/school-bus-driver-wages-1.4274561>) and was clearly not grooming himself for a life of split shifts and crying kids. I pulled over and hopped on the bus. He looked like he had seen the horror of battle and knew he had lost.

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Instead of gently guiding him back to the school, I gave into my dad rage and strode past him, picked up my daughter and walked the last block myself. The rest of the students on the bus stared at us with blank faces. Sorry kids, war is brutal.

The driver returned the next day and eventually learned the route. My daughter got used to the routine. Still, it's kind of a bizarre morning ritual. We would never think of sending our four-year-old alone in a taxi, or an airplane, or on a public bus, yet we shuffle her onto the bus in the morning and leave her without supervision. We convince ourselves that the driver is in charge, but they are rather preoccupied with the operation of a forty-foot motor vehicle in the middle of rush hour. As any parent who has tried to focus on driving with kids screaming in the back seat knows, it is not easy to drive and parent at the same time.

This combination of terrible working conditions and low pay (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/school-bus-driver-wages-1.4274561>) means that it has become increasingly difficult to find qualified school bus drivers in Canada. Driver shortages (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/school-bus-shortage-1.4792329>) in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area mean that our bus often comes up to two hours late because a driver needs to cover two routes. This means we often don't know the driver who pulls up because they are shuffled around to cover other routes.

**Relevant Reading:** How I'm Teaching My Child to Ride Public Transit Without Me (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/how-im-teaching-my-child-to-ride-public-transit-without-me>)

It becomes harder to explain to my daughters that they can consider the bus driver a "trusted adult" if I've never seen them before.

With all of that in mind, I do think that as a culture, we are often afraid of things outside our control: terrorism, plane — or in this case, bus — crashes and "stranger danger." The things we could never really prepare for — try as I might (I hired a car share to follow my daughter's first school bus ride, in case you've forgotten).

And that said, we are a family with no car living in a large Canadian city — we don't really have much choice in how we get our kids to school. And if I'm being honest, there are upsides to the bus experience: it allows my kids to attend a French public school that is too far to walk to, and I don't have to battle the traffic myself. Plus, my daughters have made some good friends on that bus.

After all, as most Canadians know, there's nothing that builds camaraderie more than complaining about the morning commute.

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