

## **From the Desk of Sheriff Bob Gualtieri**

It's back-to-school time, so get ready for your first lesson of the school year: traffic safety.

The streets on which you transport your children to school or they travel to the bus stop are populated by drivers on their cell phones, putting on their make-up, and eating breakfast as they rush to make it to work or drop off their own kids on time.

In addition to average pedestrians' usual dangers, like drivers' blind spots and violations, young children's slower walking speeds, small stature, minimal traffic experience, still-developing cognitive abilities, and general impulsiveness increase the threat of an accident.

So whether you drive your children to school or you send them to the bus stop, we've got some back-to-school traffic safety tips for you and your students.

### **For you**

1. During the school year, you can expect increased traffic in the mornings and afternoons. Allot extra time to get where you're going to prevent rushing and making careless, dangerous mistakes.
2. It is illegal – not to mention dangerous – to pass a school bus when it displays its stop signal. So unless the roadway is divided by an unpaved space of at least 5 feet, a raised median, or a physical barrier, hit the brakes while students board and disembark the bus.
3. There is a reason that speeding fines are doubled in school zones and designated school crossings. Be alert for signs designating such areas as well as for school crossing guards who will help direct you.

### **For your kids**

1. Riding the bus? Stand at least three giant steps from the curb while waiting for the bus. Stay there until it comes to a complete stop and opens the doors before boarding.
2. Riding a bicycle? Florida law requires children under age 16 to wear a helmet while riding a bike. Check bikes regularly to ensure they're properly maintained, and remember the basic rules of the road: ride in a single-file line on the right side of the road, make a complete stop at stop signs and intersections, and walk bikes across busy streets.
3. Drivers aren't the only ones whose distractions can be deadly. While a rowdy travel-buddy, a cell phone, a video game, or a forgotten homework assignment may vie for pedestrians' attention, paying attention to the sidewalks, roads, and directions from school crossing guards take priority – always.

So as you ease back into the school year, make sure that with alarm clocks, homework, and afterschool activities, you add everyday traffic safety to your weekday routine.