

## Back-to-School Carpooling and Safety Tips

[Back-to-school](#) means back to hectic schedules. Between sports, clubs, and other after-school events it feels like you are being pulled in all directions. Considering that other parents are making the same hectic trek, there's an opportunity to lighten the load: Carpooling.

Not only can carpooling free up your schedule, but it can also help you [save on gas](#). (Definitely a bonus!) Follow these tips to set up your carpooling experience for success:

### 1. Find your carpool buddies.

It's best to carpool within a trusted network of fellow parents. Start with your child's friends to see who might be joining the same activities. If they live nearby, that could be a match. Otherwise, ask the coach or activity coordinator for a parent contact list and reach out to those who live close to you. Also talk to parents at activity pickup, at school PTO meetings, or at your local religious services. Even friends of friends could be good carpooling candidates.

*Pro Tip: Pick the right number of kids for your carpool. Younger children need more attention, and so their carpools should be smaller.*

### 2. Set the schedule.

It's important to make a set schedule so kids aren't left waiting. Using a carpool app can help you organize, and some apps even come with reminders. Some popular apps include [Carpool-kids](#), [Waze Carpool](#), and [GoKid](#). You can even use [Signup Genius](#) or Google Sheets. (If you use Google, you will want to download the Sheets app to your smartphone.) You also can do an email or text chain.

Choose the system that works for your group and make sure everyone is comfortable with it. Also, it's important to make sure you can communicate with other parents in the case of an emergency, [accident](#), sickness, or unexpected change of plans. (Anyone who has forgotten an early dismissal day knows the importance of communication.)

*Pro Tip: Post a copy of the carpooling schedule near your front door and include it in your child's backpack. This way, he or she knows who is picking them up each day.*

### 3. Set expectations.

If possible, schedule an in-person meeting with your carpooling participants. Not only does it make it easier to create the schedule, it helps you come to an agreement on rules and expectations. For example, how many minutes late is too late? What is the policy if you're picking up a child who is not ready? Verify schedules and conflicts. Determine food allergies, if any. Inquire about health-related concerns.

*Pro Tip: Important point for discussion: Don't let anyone outside of the carpooling group cover the route (e.g., babysitter or grandma) unless every parent is aware and agrees.*

#### **4. Stay safe.**

Don't forget to discuss [safety](#) rules. For example, children must enter and exit the vehicle from the curbside. Only kids who are 13 and older may ride in the front passenger seat. Students who do not meet the necessary height and weight requirements must ride in a child safety or [booster seat](#). For carpooling, consider harness-style options that move the seatbelt down, rather than boost the child up, such as the [WhizRider](#). These lightweight accessories can travel with your child and fit right in their backpack for easy access for carpooling.

#### **5. Do a practice run.**

You know the route to *your* child's activities, but you may not be familiar with the addresses where you'll be dropping off your carpool kids. Do a practice run with the kids. This will help you to work out any issues before you start the carpooling schedule.

#### **6. Bring snacks.**

If you're shuttling kids from school to after-school activities, [snacks](#) and drinks are a must. Even if you're just taking them home, you'll find that food and drinks help to keep them happy. Greet kids with healthy, portable snacks that don't create too much mess. Chilled water in reusable bottles makes a great choice because if it's spilled, there won't be any stains. Keep any food allergies in mind when selecting snacks; alternatively, you can ask parents to pack their own child's treats.

*Pro Tip: Have a cleanup pack on hand that includes paper towels and baby wipes. Put a trash bag in the back seat where the kids can place their trash.*

#### **7. Don't forget entertainment.**

Even a short car ride can be made more enjoyable when the occupants are entertained. This may include car karaoke with their favorite songs or taking turns reading aloud from a joke book. You also may want to provide games with magnetic pieces. Just make sure you have a place to store them, such as a back seat organizer. For older kids with different musical preferences, headphones work well as they listen or watch on their own devices. Finally, if you're going to be waiting in the car, bring things that entertain you, such as a favorite book, a [relaxing playlist](#), and a charger, and enjoy some much-deserved "you" time.

#### **8. Check in with your child.**

Things may be going well on your end, but you don't know what happens when the other parents are driving. Check in periodically with your child. Get his or her perspective on the carpooling arrangement, and make adjustments as needed. It's also a chance to consider whether you need to rethink participating in a carpool.

Finally, if you're transporting precious cargo, you'll want to ensure your vehicle is carpooling ready. Keep your car well [maintained](#), and protect your vehicle and its occupants with the [right insurance](#) for peace of mind.

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