

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN DRIVING IN SCHOOL ZONES

From JMP Driving and Traffic School –



“Our children depend on your driving” is a message that has been presented countless of times in various mediums to remind motorists on safe driving behaviors to prevent serious injuries and fatalities to children in motor vehicle crashes. But how many embed that message while speeding through a school zone to get to work on time? How many recall the message while sending a text message to a spouse, friend, or colleague as they drive through a school zone?

Many child pedestrians are killed in streets or sidewalks of their school zones due to the reckless and irresponsible behaviors of motorists. In 2009, 183 child pedestrians between the ages of 5-15 were killed in motor vehicle crashes. In 2008, 20% of all children between 5 and 9 killed nationwide in traffic crashes were pedestrians, that’s 78 deaths. Here is another message that should be remembered while driving: *“Slow Down, you are never far from a school.”*

Around most schools the school zone speed limit is either 15 or 20 mph. Special speed limit signs are posted around schools to alert one as they enter the zone. These signs have flashing lights to tell you when the lower speed limit is in effect. There is also a sign to indicate when you have left the school zone. The reasons for lower speed limits when school children are present are obvious. Kids will be crossing the street on foot and on their bicycles. There will be extra heavy traffic of parents picking up their kids. Kids are also very unpredictable so one never knows when a child will hastily cross the street when they are not supposed to. In addition, there will be school buses entering or exiting the school. Therefore, the following are a numerous **school zone safety** tips and what you need to know for motorists:

- Because of their size, it is difficult for children to see motorists or for motorists to see them. Because their peripheral vision is about one-third narrower than an adult’s, children can’t see a motorist approaching from the right or left as soon as an adult can.
- Children also have difficulty judging a car’s speed and distance, and they often think that if they can see the driver, the driver can see them.
- Drivers should **observe speed limits** at all times, *but especially around children*. When driving in school zones, near playgrounds, or in neighborhoods where children might be playing, motorists should always expect a child to dart out into the roadway.

- When turning left at a green light or making a right turn on red, drivers need to look for pedestrians as well as cars. Pedestrians always have the right of way in these situations.
- Please be kind to school crossing guards. These guards provide countless hours helping our children cross busy streets as they arrive and depart from school. Crossing guards often encounter hostile attitudes from individuals who are more concerned with their own personal agendas than the safety of school children.
- While picking up kids, don't stop or park in the crosswalk.
- Avoid using a cell phone in and around school zones. If you are texting, talking or making a call, it can affect your ability to react quickly. Again, children's actions can be unpredictable. Also many drivers miss the school zone speed limit signs and signals due to the cell phone distraction.
- When a school bus stops you must stop. Never pass a school bus that is loading or unloading children. Passing a stopped school bus is a four point infraction and is very dangerous.
- Apply the **defensive driving SIPDE formula** in school zones. S= Search (*the driving environment*), I= Identify (*predetermined or possible hazards*), P= Predict (*the worst course of action other drivers or passengers might take in those scenarios*), D=Decide (*what you will do to avoid a crash*), E=Execute (*do what you decided to do*).

In a school zone scenario, an example would be: SEARCH the school zone environment; IDENTIFY any possible hazards or predetermined hazards such as children walking too close to sidewalk; PREDICT the worst course of action the children might take such as abruptly crossing the street or crossing it between moving vehicles; DECIDE what you will do such as maintaining a safe following distance, slowing down a couple of miles even though you are driving within the speed limit, and paying full attention to the school zone environment; and finally EXECUTE your decisions.

No preoccupation, personal agenda, or impatience is worth causing children to be killed in motor vehicle crashes. By zoning in on that thought process and mentality every day while we drive, we can be key stakeholders to be in the cool zone of driving