

A New School Year is Here, so Slow Down in Those School Zones

With the new school year upon us, I'm always amazed at how people have a hard time getting used to slowing down in school zones. It's always an adjustment. When the school year first begins, I often forget to allow for those extra five minutes or so that I need to get to work, my appointments, etc.

But we all need to give ourselves that extra time, so we slow down when children are around. It doesn't take much for an accident to happen, especially at arrival and dismissal times. That's when parents (a.k.a. drivers) are always in a hurry to drop off or pick up the kids and get onto the next task at hand, whether it's getting to work or the grocery store.

Please take the time – and pay extra attention – as you drive through neighborhoods and school areas this new school year. To help you out, I've come up with these six tips:

1. Slow down and obey the speed limits in school zones and surrounding neighborhoods. I've sort of mentioned this one already. But it's worth repeating.

2. Be alert and expect the unexpected. Remove all of those distractions, like your morning cup of Joe and your cell phone. Children may cross the street at the wrong place or unexpectedly run in front of you. You want to be alert enough to see them.

3. When you drop off or pick up your kids, make sure you abide by your school's procedures. Avoid double parking or stopping in crosswalks, or loading or unloading the kids across the street from the school. You don't want your kids crossing streets that may be busy or at mid-block.

4. Be courteous and patient. This can sometimes be hard if you're running late, but it's always a good idea to be considerate of other parents, who also may be running late or need to get back into traffic after dropping off their children. As a reminder, give pedestrians the right of way, especially school children in crosswalks.

5. Stop when school buses are flashing their red lights. Don't proceed until the school bus starts moving and has its red lights turned off, or until signaled by the school bus driver to proceed.

6. Finally, watch for children everywhere. Kids may be walking or bicycling near a school, or playing and gathering near bus stops. They could dart in front of you after they get off the bus. They could be in the area when you are backing out of your driveway. Look out for them and make sure your route is clear.