



Disability Development Resources, L.L.C.

Transporting Persons who have Special Needs

Social service agencies often provide services to Consumers who have special needs and/or use a wheelchair. These two situations represent another layer of challenges to the service provider when they must transport these Consumers. When people who have special needs are not afforded the respect and dignity that all people deserve, the negative effects can be devastating. During transport, serious and sometimes fatal injuries can occur during sudden stops, acceleration, turns and accidents if procedures for properly securing wheelchairs and passengers are not followed.

Properly training Direct Support Professionals to transport Consumers who have special needs is one of the best tools available for safeguarding the health, safety and well being of these passengers

Who has special transportation needs?

People who use wheelchairs are the most identifiable members of the special needs community who have transportation guidelines, but there are others that must be included. People with hearing impairments and people who are visually impaired also must be considered, as well as people who have a cognitive disability.

Key items you should know *BEFORE* you transport people who have special needs

Effective and efficient communication plays a key role in the process of transporting members of the special needs community. Always treat the passenger with respect and dignity. Make certain that you have the full attention of the passenger when you are communicating. Be clear and to the point when communicating verbally, or visually.

As a DSP, you should be fully briefed about ALL the passengers' challenges when transporting Consumers with special needs. Never assume that someone can or cannot see or hear; do not assume someone is completely cognitive of their situation.

When assisting Consumers who have visual impairments, always speak in a normal tone of voice. Never touch a visually impaired Consumer before speaking and introducing yourself to them. Once initial communication is made, it should be maintained throughout the trip. Visually impaired people often have a better developed auditory sense and rely heavily upon that sense. Always ask the Consumer how they would like to be led to, from, or inside the vehicle. Make certain that when you are leading the Consumer, you are able to scan the area ahead for obstructions, impediments or turns and relay this information to the Consumer. Scanning ahead will also protect you from an accidental trip or fall.

When assisting people who have hearing impairments, approach the person from the front. Use universal signs and gestures or American Sign Language to indicate directions. Speak in a normal tone of voice. Do not shout as it may cause distortion for people with hearing devices. Refrain from using exaggerated mouth movements as it may impede someone's ability to lip read. Identify yourself by pointing to a name tag or I.D. badge. Use a pen or pencil and paper to communicate.

When assisting people who have a cognitive disability, make sure to speak with the person who turns the passenger over to you about what behaviors to expect and how to recognize indications of discomfort or displeasure. Ask the responsible person how much the passenger will understand and how you should speak to the passenger. (i.e., firmly or softly)

When helping a passenger who needs assistance to stand, practice good body mechanics. Keep your back straight, brace your footing by keeping your feet shoulder-width apart, bend your knees and use your own body weight to lift the passenger. Ask the person about their strong or weak side and ask them on which side they prefer to be assisted. Always assist a person using a cane on the opposite side.

Adapted from Philadelphia Insurance Loss Controls Services. Modified to meet the needs of DDR Consumers.