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Transporting Students with Special Needs

When you transport students with special needs you are transporting students who have a wide variety of disabilities ranging from physical to behavioral needs.

Transporting students with special needs takes dedicated individuals who are dealing with students which require more care and attention.

Communication:

1) Contact Teachers & TA's

Teachers and Teacher Assistants (TA's) are a valuable source of information.

2) Daily Communication

Touch base daily with parents/guardians, teachers and teacher assistants. This will help you know how the students are doing. Document specific concerns to be given to dispatch.

Student Information Exchange:

At the beginning of each school year there will be a scheduled time for all Special Ed drivers to exchange information about the students on their routes.

The operation of the wheelchair lift and securing of wheelchairs are the driver's responsibility. Assistance by others is not permitted with the only exception being TAs who may be trained to operate the lift as a "back-up" to the driver. Safe operation of the lift always remains the drivers' responsibility. In most instances TAs can assist by supervising the students on board the bus while chairs are being loaded and unloaded by the driver.

Siblings wishing to help by bringing special needs students to and from the bus can only do so if they have the direct permission from either the teacher or TA in charge or under the direction of the parent.

Scheduling Transportation

Route Changes – Personalized Scheduling for Each Student

Parents requesting different drop off locations, for any reason, must notify dispatch in advance.

Wheelchair Maintenance and Cleanliness

The Maintenance and cleanliness of the wheelchair is the responsibility of the parents. Occupational Therapists are responsible for maintaining the chair.

Loading and Unloading

Loading and unloading of special needs students requires a more specific plan depending on the needs and abilities of the student. Student pick up procedures depend on the students' designation.

DNLU (Do not leave unattended)

This student requires the aid of a parent or guardian when picking up or dropping off at the bus stop.

Loading and Unloading Procedures

- Use the standard procedures for loading/unloading most students as described in the School Bus Drivers Training Manual.
- Do not use the red overhead lights as it is a much slower process to unload special needs students when assistance is required. The procedure is as follows:
 - Activate turn signal indicator
 - Pull off the traveled portion of the road ensuring you have sufficient space to unfold the wheelchair ramp if needed
 - Stop the bus and activate the four way emergency flashers

Authorization of person to receive a student once he/she is discharged from the bus:

A person who is receiving a student other than an immediate family member must be authorized by the parent or guardian. The parent/caregiver must complete and Authorization form.

Restraint Devices – Why use restraints?

Some students require restraints to keep them in the bus. Other students tend to fall asleep on the bus and need a wide belt to keep their bodies in the upright position.

Restraints can only be used if parents grant us authority.

Types of Restraints

- Seat belt – this is the most passive approach used for a very compliant student who just needs that extra encouragement to stay in the seat
- Passive restraint – this is a large wide belt which wraps around the waist and buckles in behind the backrest of the seat so the student cannot undo the belt themselves.
- Harness – this type of restraint is used for students who need their body kept in an upright position making it virtually impossible for them to get out.

Medical

Be aware of your students' medical condition and needs (i.e. do they have a feeding tube, allergies?). In the event of an emergency you need to know if they are hooked up.

Medical Aid Intervention

This is **not** the responsibility of the driver. A basic first aid course is taken to assist in emergency situations. Students with high medical needs should have already been identified to us and will have been assigned a TA.

Safety Concern Report

- Report any condition or behavioral problem to dispatch and
- Complete a Safety Concern Report

Administration of Medication

- Special Needs drivers will never administer medication
- If medication is required while transporting a student, a TA will be required to ride the bus

Transportation of Additional Equipment/Medical Aid

The following can be transported provided they are secure and do not obstruct the emergency exits:

- Oxygen tanks – must be secured to the wheelchair. **REF:** Motor Vehicle Act – Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulation Sect. 2.3f
- Walking aids
- Standing supports, etc.

Seizures

Protocol for Dealing with Seizures

- Pull off to the side of the road and activate four way flashers.
- Notify dispatch to call for an ambulance – give location.
- Give care to the individual by making sure they are not hurting themselves when convulsing. Do not try to restrain a convulsing student.
- Speak in a calm reassuring voice to the individual to let them know everything is OK.
- It is important that each driver knows his students and their seizure activity. Most students have a pattern to their seizures, e.g. night time or day time in certain situations, where they are more susceptible.
- When a seizure happens outside the norm for a particular student, the situation becomes an emergency.

Driver Care

Personal Health & Safety

Protecting Your Back:

Protecting your back is crucial to you as an employee and is critical to the smooth operation of special needs transportation. When tying down the wheelchairs, avoid bending over – bend your knees.

Protecting your Knees

Some drivers have found that tying down wheelchairs causes irritation of the knees. We provide floor mats and knee pads to protect your knees. These are available upon request from the dispatcher.

Preventative Measures

Regular exercise will strengthen your body in preparation for the demands of a special needs driver. Some drivers are involved in walking, swimming, volleyball and jogging. We would encourage you to get involved in some form of a regular exercise plan.

Vaccinations

Throughout the school year, parents send students with a variety of illnesses to school. As a result, drivers are susceptible to colds and other sickness. The flu shot is available every fall through your local medical clinic.

Protect Yourself

- Always wear gloves when administering first aid (all buses have them).
- Public Health recommends that we practice “Universal Precautions” whereby we treat blood and body fluids of every person as potentially infectious.
- Remember to “glove up” when we have to clean up a mess from our special needs students.

Vehicle Knowledge

Pre-Trip Inspection

Operation of the wheelchair lift must be tested during pre-trip inspection. Also, ensure your wheelchair chalk is present.

Familiarization

You must be completely familiar with the layout of your bus and the operation of the wheelchair lift. Also, ensure your securing devices and wheelchair ramp work properly before leaving the compound.

Wheelchair Loading and Unloading

Operation of a Wheelchair Lift:

All aspects of the wheelchair lift operation from opening the door to unfolding and lowering the lift must be done by the driver. This is part of the drivers’ responsibility and must be done by the driver because of liability issues.

Whenever possible load all the wheelchair students first. Once you have loaded all the wheelchair students, ensure that the ramp is folded in and the door closed. Then allow walk-on students to board the bus.

Secure Bus:

- Park the bus, put transmission in neutral and apply park brake.
- Turn off engine and, when possible, remove the ignition key.
- Turn on lift switch if the bus is so equipped.
- Open wheelchair ramp door from the outside and secure the door with chain.
- Using the remote control, unfold the ramp by pressing “deploy” and lower ramp by pressing down

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Procedures for Loading Wheelchair:

Loading the Ramp:

- Undo the safety belt on the ramp (inter lock)
- **BACK** the W/C onto the ramp using both hands on the handles of the W/C.
- Apply both brakes and fasten safety belt on ramp (inter lock)

The wheelchair is always backed onto the ramp for three reasons:

- 1) So students' feet don't get caught as you raise the ramp
 - 2) Enables the driver to have more control if he/she should fall backwards
 - 3) Gives stability to lift with overall weight close to the bus
- Use the remote control with one hand and with the other hand holding the W/C handle, raise the ramp up to the floor level (make sure you allow the ramp to finish it's cycle)
 - Interlock must be in place
 - Disengage W/C brakes and back W/C off ramp and wheel into a W/C location

Securing the Lap Belt:

- Place the lap belt and shoulder strap (if equipped) on student. **NOTE:** Make sure that the lap belt is around the waist and is snug. It is not acceptable to place the belt over top of the tray. It must go underneath the armrest to ensure that the belt goes across the waist.
- This is the equivalent to their seat belt. Ensure it is being used for the passengers' safety.
- Pull on the W/C to ensure it is secure.
- Adjust front straps one more time to snug up.

Unloading Wheelchair

Unloading is the reverse procedure of the loading process.

- Make sure you get out of your bus and open the W/C door. Secure it and then unfold the ramp. **NOTE:** do this from the outside of the bus so you can see if anyone is in the path of the platform.
- Make sure that brakes are always applied on the W/C ramp.
- Make certain you have folded the ramp and closed the door prior to loading walk-on students.

Vehicle Knowledge

Manual Operation of Wheelchair Lift:

All drivers must be familiar with the manual operation of the wheelchair lift. Practice the manual operation frequently.

- 1) From inside of the bus, insert the handle into the screw valve and turn counter clockwise and manually lower the ramp to the ground. This procedure is used for both unfolding and lowering the ramp.
- 2) Using the manual handle, close valve by turning clockwise.
- 3) To lift and fold the wheelchair ramp, insert handle into upper pump socket and pump. This will lift and fold the W/C ramp back into position.
- 4) Replace handle in holding slot.

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of having a good evacuation plan.

Each driver is responsible for preparing his/her own Emergency Evacuation plan at the beginning of the school year.

VIEW VIDEO: "The Safest Way Out" and "Special Emergency Evacuation" (available at dispatch).

Emergency Exit Methods

Walk-On Students:

- Front and rear evacuation
- Know the abilities of your students. Enlist the help of the more capable students.
- Practice rear evacuation – this can be a challenge with some special needs students.

Wheelchair:

Two Step Method

This method is useful when you have more than one wheelchair and a helper.

- Lower ramp half way
- Roll chair off back wheels to platform level
- Roll chair off ramp to ground level
- Note: Always have assistance when performing this method.

Cut & Carry

It is often quickest to take the student out of their wheelchair and carry them out of the bus. Be familiar with how the student is kept in their chair, i.e. pelvic bar, posture control device or foot straps. Often it is quicker to cut off belts.

For students who are too heavy to carry, set them on a blanket or jacket and pull along the floor to evacuate them.

Resources Found in “Best Practices Manual”

- 1) Appendix #1 – The Safest Way Out
- 2) Appendix #2 – Special Emergency Evacuations
- 3) Appendix #3 – School Bus Evacuation

Additional Suggestions:

- Use a rope to guide kids together once they are off the bus in the safe zone
- Use a blanket to pull or drag heavier students out of the bus
- Teach students how to use the 2 way radio and hand brakes, with discretion
- Train the kids to help if the driver is incapacitated

Have an emergency plan for each specific child’s needs.

- Can the student talk?
- Can he/she help other students?
- Is the student a runner?
- Can they be given a task?

Practice makes perfect.

Hand in your draft copy of Evacuation Plan by the 3rd week in October.

A final draft is required by November 1st.

