

# UNIT D - TRANSPORTATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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# UNIT D - TRANSPORTATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

## INTRODUCTION

There are two significant laws that ensure services to students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) is a federal law ensuring special education and related services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEIA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services including transportation. This law mandates that school districts provide transportation services for all eligible students, regardless of their disability. Chapter 14 of the Pennsylvania Code (Title 22) provides regulatory guidance in Pennsylvania to ensure compliance with IDEIA, and its regulations. This chapter can be found at [www.pacode.com](http://www.pacode.com).

A second major law related to students with disabilities is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This federal law assures other protected students with disabilities receive the accommodations and related services they require in order to access educational programs. Students who qualify for Section 504 services do not require specially designed instruction (or special education services which would require an IEP); however, they do require accommodations that may include specialized transportation services. The federal requirements of Section 504 are addressed under Chapter 15 of the Pennsylvania Code (Title 22).

Local school districts are responsible for providing individualized educational programs (IEP) for the students who qualify for special education services under the IDEIA within their district. The school district or intermediate unit is responsible for identifying, locating, evaluating, and providing services for all students who qualify for special education within its boundaries and placing them into appropriate programs planned uniquely for them. Students are required to be included in the least restrictive (e.g., general education) environment when appropriate, including ordinary transportation to and from school. Where this is not possible or appropriate, however, specialized transportation services are provided, often involving different types of vehicles and procedures. With this special transportation, these students can receive the education, therapy and other opportunities they need.

Although transportation is a privilege for regular education students, it is an entitlement for students with special needs. Transportation is typically listed as a related service on IEPs. If special considerations for transportation are warranted for students, they will be addressed within the 504 Service Agreement (or Chapter 15 Service Agreement).

The inclusion of special education and other protected students with disabilities in general education classes and transportation is increasing. Consequently, bus drivers must have a working knowledge of the guidelines for managing students with disabilities while they are being transported; and special transportation procedures used for these students.

This unit provides information on both of these topics. The position you hold as driver for these students may be one of the most demanding and difficult jobs you will ever have, but it may also be one of the most rewarding. Keep in mind that additional, more specialized training may be provided by your employer on these topics including the proper use of wheelchair securement devices and other occupant protection systems.

## DRIVER RESPONSIBILITY

Local policy is the guideline for your role and responsibility as a driver of students with disabilities. To ensure smooth pick-up and return of students, keep in mind:

- Stops will be established by the intermediate unit or school district staff in cooperation with the transportation provider. Changes in stops must be approved by the Transportation Department. You cannot establish or change bus stops.
- The student's home may be assigned as the pick-up and return location. If so, you may wish to introduce yourself to each student's parent(s) by telephone or personal visit, and tell them approximately what time you will pick up the student each morning and approximately when you will deliver the student home in the afternoon.
- Remind parents to have the student ready for morning pickup at least five minutes before your expected arrival. If the student is continually late for pickup, notify your supervisor. (Keep written notes of dates.)
- A responsible adult should be home to receive the student in the afternoon. If not, contact your supervisor. Never leave a student with a significant disability alone, especially if help at home is expected.

### **To ensure students' safety in case of a crash:**

- Keep a written description of your route, pupils' addresses, and their telephone numbers in a safe place. This information is critical to emergency response personnel.
- If you assign permanent seats in your bus, keep one copy of the seating arrangement in the bus and turn one copy in to the office.
- Coordinate activities with any aides, paraprofessionals, personal care assistants or therapeutic support staff (TSS) who may be assigned to assist specific students or the entire bus.
- Also keep written emergency seizure plans, local policies on allergy management, use of medication, etc. Be familiar with the plans and policies as described throughout this unit and in Units H and I.

## CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

By law, information contained in school records is confidential. No one should see school records unless he/she has an educational interest in the child. Typically, only individuals who are responsible for some aspect of a child's educational program have an educational interest. As a bus driver, you are entitled to know certain information regarding a child's disability, and it may be shared with you, if you have a legitimate educational interest as a service provider. However, it is your duty to keep the information confidential. This means you cannot share records or information about a child with anyone who does not have an educational interest. More specifically, you cannot talk about a child's special needs with other students, parents of other students, or other bus drivers who do not provide transportation services for the child.

You will have to talk occasionally to parents and teachers about transporting a student. Apart from these practical conversations, do not discuss anything concerning students, parents, teachers, classes, or vehicles with parents or neighbors. If anyone raises a question, refer them to the proper source, i.e., teacher, principal, or supervisor. Never hold any discussions in front of the students.

Obtain medical and emergency information for each student from your transportation director or supervisor. Any medications used by the student, their administration, and any possible side effects should be included for each student as applicable. This information must be kept current and accessible to aides and substitute

drivers who will work with the students on your bus. Note any unique behavior patterns to watch for and procedures for managing any circumstances that might arise while the student is under your supervision. If you feel behavior patterns warrant additional attention, contact your supervisor. **Work closely with your employer to determine the extent of your duties regarding the administration of medication: FOLLOW YOUR LOCAL POLICIES.**

## **GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

To manage students with disabilities while transporting them, you must know individual specific behavior patterns and required treatments. All students are affected by other people's actions, particularly people who play significant roles in their lives. Students with disabilities may be especially sensitive to the behavior and moods of others.

Parents, teachers and special education professionals can give you information about the nature and extent of a student's disability along with other relevant information. In some instances, it may be appropriate for a bus driver to be included in an IEP meeting or a 504 Service Plan meeting in order to ensure necessary information is shared. School staff will coordinate such meetings, and you will be invited, if deemed appropriate.

In addition to following the previous guidelines for managing students outlined in Unit B, keep these points in mind when working with students with disabilities:

- Be observant and try to anticipate problems. Always expect the unexpected.
- Keep teachers, professionals and parents informed of problems with the student or significant changes in behavior.
- In dealing with individuals with limited cognitive skills or mental retardation, work with the classroom teacher or parents to learn and understand appropriate communication methods for that student. Some students may use an augmentative communication device such as a laminated card with pictures or a computer with a voice simulator to express their needs. It may be helpful to ask simple yes/no questions in order to communicate effectively.
- Give students with emotional or behavioral disorders some responsibility in setting the standards of behavior they must meet.
- If a student with an emotional disorder becomes agitated or loses self-control, you should verbally intervene and attempt to calm the situation. Do so in a calm, directive manner.
- Be aware that "bad days" happen. The student's efficiency and self control may vary from day to day or from week to week. These puzzling shifts may lead you to feel much of the student's behavior is willful disobedience. Remember, these fluctuations may not be under the student's control. Document these incidents and report them to your supervisor, if you feel additional attention is needed. In some cases, you may work with a classroom teacher and parent to implement a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) reflecting the goals identified for that student's development.
- Always put safety first. If a student's behavior is distracting or dangerous to others, report the situation to your supervisor immediately.
- Introduce a substitute driver to the students in advance, if possible, since a change in routine or environment (e.g., driver change) may cause some students to react emotionally. Substitute drivers or aides must also be made aware, and be properly trained to understand and work with each student on the bus. Make sure the new driver has explicit, written instructions about the route and pick-up and drop-off times for each student.

## **“START”: A MEMORY AID FOR MANAGING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

You will likely carry at least one student with a disability on your bus during your driving career. Because a bus operator may not even know he/she is transporting a student with a disability, all operators should be aware of the special concerns relating to these passengers. An easy way to remember these special concerns is with the word “START.”

S = Special . . . . . Every student is unique. You should get to know each one and learn their individual traits. Talk with the student, their parents, aides, and teachers to find out important information. Students, even those who have similar conditions, are different. The more you know about their needs, the better you can accommodate them. Be aware some information is confidential.

T = Treat Equally . . . . . Students with disabilities want to be treated the same as all other students. Although there are many differences, whenever possible, all students should be required to follow the same rules.

A = Attention . . . . . You must pay specific attention to students with disabilities. Some students will behave poorly in order to get your attention. By paying attention to them when their behavior is appropriate, you may improve their behavior. They may require more of your time than other students.

R = Restraints . . . . . Students with physical disabilities often require special seats or restraining devices. If you are driving a bus equipped with these devices, learn to properly secure these students in their seats. Wheelchairs used by students need to be properly tied down.

T = Different Techniques . . . . . One particular method may not work in all situations with all students. If you are having trouble maintaining control of a student, change your method and try something new. Keep trying until you find something that works. The old saying “try, try, try again” is particularly appropriate when it comes to working with students with disabilities. Be sure to ask other drivers or your supervisor for helpful suggestions in working with particular students or situations. Even better, consult a behavioral specialist or school psychologist with expertise in this area.

## **TYPES OF DISABILITIES**

In addition to the general guidelines above, you should understand the different types of disabilities defined in the IDEIA that students you transport may have, and the specific procedures used in managing each type. Many of these conditions may not be visibly apparent, so drivers must be prepared to work with different conditions.

As mentioned earlier, some students with disabilities outlined below will require specialized transportation services often involving different types of vehicles and procedures. At the same time, some students with disabilities will be included in general education transportation, so you need to be aware of any unique guidelines or specialized procedures that are required.

## AUTISM

IDEIA defines autism as, “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three adversely affecting a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.” Autism spectrum disorders are viewed on a continuum. Students with severe autism may be nonverbal and often have mental retardation as a co-existing condition while students with milder symptoms may have some social skills deficits and a limited range of interests. Some students with autism may be included in general education transportation while others may require specialized services.

### **Behaviors that may be evident in students who are autistic include:**

- Indifference to other people - Students with autism sometimes treat other people as if they were objects and just in the way. They may bump into you as if you were a piece of furniture, without excusing themselves or noticing they bumped into another person.
- Difficulty looking people in the eye - When you talk to students with autism, you may have to work hard to get and keep their attention, especially if they are not facing you. The students may not notice or pay attention to other students or adults.
- Problems with their speech and language - Some students with autism cannot speak at all, and others may just scream or make other noises. Students who do speak may have some unusual speech patterns. For example, some students have trouble with pronouns and may use “you” instead of “I” when speaking. Some students tend to repeat what they hear instead of responding in a more typical way. For example, a student may repeat, “How are you?,” instead of responding to the question.
- Unusual reactions to different parts of their environment - They are very resistant to any change in routine or environment. They are easily upset and anxious about changes other students may not even notice, such as if a different type of bus picks them up, if they are in the window seat instead of the aisle seat, or if they are sitting next to someone new. They are often very sensitive to changes in temperature, loud noises, or physical touch, and may have a panic reaction at times to some of these changes.
- Unusual interest in objects - They may cling to objects, and examine and reexamine them. They may also be fascinated by various kinds of movements, for example, becoming completely absorbed by a spinning wheel or fan.
- Problems with their own movement - They may repeat movements over and over again without any particular purpose, for example, swaying, rocking, banging their head, or flapping their hands.
- Non-age appropriate behavior - Some students with autism may display behavior more typical of much younger students.

When working with students who are autistic, remember these students are affected by a disorder; their conduct is not necessarily willful. They cannot always control or stop their behavior upon request. These students need sameness, calmness, structure, and firmness along with gentleness, and patience. Here are a few pointers:

- Stick to a routine with the students. It will be critical.
- Prepare students for changes, such as detours, new passengers or substitute bus drivers.

- Use short, simple sentences and concrete concepts when communicating. For example, “Stay in your seat.”
- Recognize when students may be experiencing stress from changes in the environment.
- Do not insist on eye contact.
- Some students respond well to music. Parents may be able to help you determine what medium will provide a calming effect during the bus ride.

## **DEAF AND BLIND (DEAF-BLINDNESS)**

Some students may have hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. If available, you should work with a mobility specialist and the student to determine the best methods for assistance (sighted guide techniques, etc.). Many intermediate units (IUs) will have mobility specialists who can work with you.

Drivers should learn signals for help, distress, toileting needs, illness, hunger, and any other daily events that may occur on a bus as these signals are the only means by which the student can communicate. Consider seating students who are deaf and blind close to the bus door for ease of exit/entry and to avoid objects or people who may block movement in the aisle. Also, avoid seat reassignment for behavior management to ensure a consistent orientation route from the stairwell to their seat.

## **DEAFNESS/HEARING IMPAIRMENTS**

Students who have hearing impairments may require special transportation, though the inclusion of students with hearing impairments in general education transportation is fairly common. Hearing impairments may range from some degree of hearing loss to totally deaf.

Students who are deaf are taught and communicate through their other senses and therefore rely on visual and tactile information. Their greatest difficulty is to learn speech and language. To communicate, the student often learns to respond to lip movement, facial expression, signs, and/or finger spelling. When reading lips, students may not understand all of what is said, so repetition may be necessary. As a driver, you may need to gain the student’s attention by tapping him/her on the shoulder or waving your hand. Remember to look directly at the student, maintain eye contact, and speak clearly, naturally and slowly; shouting is useless. Repetition, facial expressions and gestures can also help with communication. Ask the teacher or parent to explain the nature and extent of the student’s hearing loss, and the best way to communicate with him or her. If the student communicates using sign language, you should attempt to learn a few common, useful ‘signs’ the student will understand.

## **EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE**

Students who are emotionally disturbed have a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects their educational performance:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors;
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory relationships with peers and teachers;
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The inclusion of students with emotional disturbance in general education transportation is fairly common. These students may act in ways that are inappropriate, either in their nature or in their timing or degree. Since many have unusual difficulties maintaining interpersonal relationships, they can be aggressive, withdrawn, anxious, or easily frustrated. These students may be unable to express feelings and needs. They may be loud, excitable, defiant and aggressive, particularly when confronted by adults setting rules, such as bus drivers. Behavior may include destroying property, starting fights, and using offensive or inappropriate language. On the other end of the spectrum, some students who are emotionally disturbed have a pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and do not cope well with stress. They may be excessively shy and withdrawn, and avoid contact with their peers and adults alike.

As a bus driver, it is likely you will encounter students with emotional disturbances. Therefore, it is important to be calm, firm, fair, and consistent. Pay attention to your students and immediately report any threats of suicide to the school. It is a difficult challenge to maintain a professional distance and to stay involved with the students, but it is an important responsibility of the bus driver.

## **INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY**

IDEIA defines intellectual disability as, “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects the child’s educational performance.” In other words, these students have impaired intellectual development, which seriously reduces their ability to learn. In addition, they struggle with age appropriate adaptive behavior skills. Adaptive behavior refers to the daily living skills that students need to function and includes communication, personal care, motor skills, and social skills. Some students will have mild intellectual disability while others will be significantly impaired, and so the levels of driver assistance and/or specialized equipment may vary.

As the bus driver, you may find it useful to assign specific seats with appropriate seat belts or child safety restraint systems (CSRS, i.e., car seat, safety vest, etc.). One person per seat is best. Consistency in the bus routes, personnel and service will help the trip go smoothly. Be patient as students with intellectual disability will require more repetition than typical peers to learn procedures.

## MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

A student with multiple disabilities has a combination of disabilities (such as intellectual disability and blindness or intellectual disability and orthopedic impairment). The combination of disabilities causes such severe educational needs that such students cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.

Students with multiple disabilities often require specialized transportation, especially if one of the impairments is an orthopedic impairment. These students are typically severely impaired and may need significant assistance in all areas of functioning. It would be important to obtain specific guidance for such severely impaired students from knowledgeable individuals such as the parents, teachers and other specialists to include physical therapists, speech therapists or mobility specialists.

## ORTHOPEdic IMPAIRMENTS

Students with orthopedic impairments have severe orthopedic issues that adversely affect their educational performance. The impairments may be a result of a congenital anomaly, disease or other causes. Some students may require wheelchairs or other holding devices for mobility, while others can walk with crutches or a walker. Therefore, they may need help in loading and unloading the bus. Refer to the later section on special equipment and your local specialized training provided by your employer or IU.

Whenever possible, students with minor physical disabilities are integrated into the regular transportation system, but may need some slight assistance. Other students may have physical disabilities that might not affect mobility in terms of boarding a bus, but may impair speech or other forms of communication, writing, or arm, hand, eye, and head movement. This may affect their seating requirements on your bus.

### Some common physical disorders and their effects include:

- **Cerebral Palsy (CP)** — Causes abnormal changes in physical movement, such as slow or spastic limb movement or seizures. A person with CP may be unable to coordinate body movement and may have possible speech problems. Intellectual functioning is often not affected. In the transportation setting, a student with CP may need a special harness.
- **Muscular Dystrophy (MD)** — A progressive general weakening of various muscle groups in the body. Students with MD may fatigue easily and may require the use of braces, harnesses or a wheelchair.
- **Spina Bifida** — A birth defect involving the spinal cord. Depending upon the severity of the defect, the student may be partially paralyzed (lower half of the body) or have a physical deformation. Some students with spina bifida are very verbal. On the bus, be careful with lower body positioning because these students may not have feeling in the lower half of their body. If they are positioned too close to a baseboard heater, they can get serious burns on their legs and not realize it.

## OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENTS

Students with other health impairments have limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli resulting in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment. This is due to chronic or acute health problems, such as asthma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, or Tourette's Syndrome. These conditions can adversely affect a child's educational performance.

When transporting students on the severe end of the spectrum, such as those requiring special transportation, you may need to talk to parents or teachers to find out about the special needs of these students on your route. Some students may wear medical identification tags specifying care and medical limitations.

Some of the more common impairments are discussed below.

## **EPILEPSY**

Epilepsy is a chronic nervous disorder, characterized by seizures of varying degrees. Students with epilepsy are commonly included in general education transportation. Epileptic seizures may be triggered by stress, hitting bumps in the road while driving, hot weather or a hot passenger compartment, strobes or flashing lights. You should know what to do, if a student has a seizure during the bus ride. Most students will have an “emergency preparedness plan” or “seizure plan”. This plan will provide you with some basic information on how to respond appropriately for that student.

### **Follow these steps to minimize any injuries to the student:**

- Listen to the student - Sometimes a student with epilepsy experiences a peculiar sensation known as an aura before a seizure. If the student warns you, pull the bus over to a safe location.
- Keep calm - The student is usually not suffering or in danger.
- Help the child to a safe place, but do not restrain his or her movements. Move anything the student may strike against with his or her head, arms, or legs. Most injuries occur from bumping hard objects.
- Do not force a hard object between the student’s teeth.
- Do not give the student anything to drink.
- Saliva may flow from the student’s mouth. Wipe it away with a tissue.
- Stand by until the student has fully recovered consciousness and seems clearheaded. The student may seem dazed and incoherent for awhile after a seizure.
- Encourage deep breathing after the student regains consciousness.
- Assure the student all is well and encourage him or her to go about regular activities.
- If the student is unconscious after the seizure, call for assistance and place him/her on his/her side in the recovery position.
- Occasionally, after a seizure, the student may want to sleep. Help him or her to a safe place to rest.
- Refer to local guidelines and procedures regarding the administration of medications and any supervisor/parent notification requirements.

## **TOURETTE'S SYNDROME**

Tourette's Syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by repetitive, stereotyped, involuntary movements, and vocalizations called tics. The early symptoms of Tourette's are almost always noticed between the ages of seven and 10 years. Most people with the condition experience their worst symptoms in their early teens, with improvement occurring in the late teens and continuing into adulthood. Students with Tourette's are commonly included in general education transportation.

Tics are classified as either simple or complex. Simple motor tics are sudden, brief and repetitive movements such as eye blinking and other vision irregularities, facial grimacing, shoulder shrugging, and head or shoulder jerking. Simple vocalizations might include repetitive throat-clearing, sniffing or grunting sounds. Complex motor tics might include facial grimacing combined with a head twist and a shoulder shrug. Other complex motor tics may actually appear purposeful, including sniffing or touching objects, hopping, jumping, bending, or twisting. More complex vocal tics include words or phrases. Do not be offended by the behavior or language exhibited as this may be a manifestation of the syndrome. Note that tics are involuntary and are often worse with excitement or anxiety and better during calm, focused activities.

### **Here are a few tips for you as a bus driver:**

- Do not point out the behavior to the student;
- Give careful consideration to seat assignment;
- Stick to a routine as much as possible; and
- Keep your rules and directions short.

## **ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)**

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) includes primarily inattentive type, primarily hyperactive-impulsive type, and combined type. Students with ADHD have significant difficulty maintaining their attention to effortful tasks, excessive physical activity and impulsivity, or both.

### **Common symptoms include:**

- Impulsiveness - A child who acts quickly without thinking first or exhibits uncontrolled, abrupt and sudden changes in behavior. Students often act without considering the consequences and may endanger or harm themselves, or others.
- Hyperactivity - A child who can't sit still, walks, runs, or climbs around when others are seated, talks when others are talking. They may also be unable to stick to one task for very long before looking for something else to do.
- Inattention - A child who daydreams or seems to be in another world or is sidetracked by what is going on around him or her.
- Forgetfulness - The student may forget items or have a tendency to misplace them.

Have patience with a student with ADHD. Like other students with impairments, have firm, fair and consistent expectations. You may need to provide verbal clues to let your student know when his/her stop is nearby so he/she can gather his/her belongings. For some students, permission to use electronic devices (i.e., music device, handheld game, etc.) may be considered to keep the child engaged in a preferred activity and minimize problem behaviors.

## **SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY**

Students with learning disabilities are those who have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. The disorder may show up as trouble with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or solving math problems. This category does not include students with learning disorders caused by visual, hearing or motor disabilities, or intellectual, emotional, cultural, economic or environmental disorders. The inclusion of students with learning disabilities in general education transportation is common.

You may find it helpful to contact the classroom teacher to ascertain what is working for the student during the school day.

## **SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT**

A speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation or a speech or language impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The inclusion of students with a speech or language impairment in general education transportation is fairly common.

Students with speech or language impairments may have trouble communicating clearly because they may be difficult to understand. Listen attentively and repeat back what you think was said. Keep your manner of responding "encouraging" rather than "correcting" and be patient! Watch a student's reaction to your response. It will help you know whether the message has been communicated. If you still don't understand the student, ask a peer to help, or ask a series of short questions that require "yes" or "no" answers. It may be helpful to use an alternative means of communication such as a pen and paper.

## **TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)**

Some students have acquired injury to the brain resulting in total or partial functional disability including impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; or speech. Participation in regular transportation will be dependent on the level of impairment.

### **Students with TBI may exhibit the following characteristics:**

- Reduced physical stamina,
- Possible seizures or headaches,
- Possible hearing or vision problems,
- Easily confused,
- Susceptible to mood swings, and
- Issues with social skills.

Remember to be consistent, and review the rules of the bus often. Be clear with your expectations. You may find it helpful to contact the classroom teacher to ascertain what is working for the student during the school day.

## VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

IDEIA indicates that students who have visual impairments have vision that, even with correction, adversely affects their educational performance. They may have partial sight, meaning they can only see low light or shapes, or be legally blind. While the visual impairment may affect their educational performance, it will not affect their intelligence unless they have cognitive disabilities as well. The educational development of students with visual impairments may not be very different from students without a visual impairment. The inclusion of students with visual impairments in general education transportation is fairly common.

Students with visual impairments should be allowed to move independently, but they should be monitored for safety. Students with visual impairments may use a cane, service animal or other mobility device, and may rely on auditory and tactile information. Consultation with an orientation or mobility specialist may be warranted when transporting students with visual impairments.

If a student with a visual impairment rides your bus, provide descriptive feedback during the ride to help the student orient, especially in advance of their stop, so they can prepare. Having the student sit near the driver can help with this. Some students may need assistance navigating the narrow steps and aisles on the bus. Also, be sure to address the student clearly and specifically by name so he/she is sure you are communicating with him/her. As the student becomes more familiar with riding your bus, he/she may need less assistance as the school year progresses. Exercise particular caution during pickup and drop off.

## TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As indicated in the sections above, transporting students with disabilities may involve special equipment and procedures in addition to basic bus driving skills. This section describes general procedures, unique bus stop procedures, the modified vehicles and special equipment used in transporting students with disabilities as well as emergency procedures and evacuation drills. Talk to your employer about obtaining specialized training in the use of unique equipment or procedures. You must become familiar with local guidelines and training.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

When determining the level of support a given student may require related to transportation, it is important to consider the following factors:

- 1. Length of Ride** – Health factors and the impact of the student’s disability should be considered as they influence the safety of the student during transit. Young students may show limited tolerance for extended bus rides, and the behavior of students with emotional disturbance or behavioral disorders tends to deteriorate as the length of the bus ride increases. There may also be unique issues for students requiring medication.
- 2. Level of Assistance Needed** – The level of assistance required by a student is influenced by the student’s age, size, sensory skills (e.g., vision, hearing), communication skills, level of intelligence, and social/emotional factors.
- 3. Seating** – Seating decisions are generally based on the student’s level of functioning. Students with limited trunk strength may require a seat belt or vest to provide additional support while on a moving bus. Students with visual impairments are likely to require an assigned seat they can independently locate. Students with significant intellectual limitations may require assistance to find their seats. Students with seizure disorders may need to be seated where they can be monitored and where lighting can be controlled.

4. **Special Adaptive and Assistive Equipment** – Seat belts, vests, harnesses, and wheelchair securement devices must be properly used. It is important to consult with a knowledgeable professional such as a physical therapist, school therapist or mobility specialist to ensure any such devices are used properly. If a student brings an assistive device on the bus, make sure it is properly secured for transport.
  
5. **Evacuation** – When preparing for the possible evacuation of students with disabilities, it is essential to have a written plan, which pays close attention to the individual needs of students. All students should participate in evacuation drills unless they have been exempted by authorized medical personnel. School bus operators and other personnel should plan to evacuate all students using all available exits with and without the use of the power lift (if applicable). Refer to Unit H for evacuation procedures.

## BUS STOP PROCEDURES

### Identifying Bus Stops

- The bus stop for many students with disabilities, especially those with physical disabilities using wheelchairs, may be located on the sidewalk or driveway in front of the students' homes.
- The bus stop should have level parking, smooth approaches from the house, and adequate space for placing ramps and loading wheelchairs.
- Bus stops where you must pull your bus over to the left side of the street, facing oncoming traffic, are prohibited.
- Just as each student requires individual attention, each stop requires its own approach. Adapt your pickup and drop off procedures for the particular needs of the student and the location.
- Stops for students with disabilities require more time and care than those for typical students. Try to find a place where traffic will not be unduly held up, if the school bus eight-way light system is activated.

### Loading Procedures

- Follow the procedures outlined in Unit C on loading and unloading for pulling up to the bus stop.
- If you can move your bus completely off of the roadway, you do not need to use the school bus eight-way light system. However, you must use the hazard warning lights.
- Sometimes students will need your help boarding or carrying their belongings. Assisting in the loading of a student with a disability (usually a student with a physical disability) is a time when you are permitted to leave the wheel of your vehicle. If you must leave the wheel, put the transmission in park or neutral and turn off the ignition. Be sure to remove the keys and set the emergency brake. On some vehicles with special equipment such as a lift, you must leave the engine on during loading and unloading. In these situations, make sure the transmission is in park or neutral, and the emergency brake is engaged before you leave the vehicle for loading or unloading. Know your vehicle.
- In order to board or exit the bus, some students may need the help of several people (e.g., parents, aides) in addition to you. Be sure all persons involved know their role in this procedure, ideally before the beginning of the school year.
- Most vehicles that transport students with disabilities have seat belts or other forms of child safety restraint systems (CSRS) you must help students secure. Before turning on the engine again, make sure all seat belts are fastened, all doors and windows are locked, all security devices are engaged, and all belongings are securely placed. Keep messages and supplies for delivery to parents or teachers in a secure place.

- Plan considerably more time to load students with disabilities, especially those with physical impairments. Follow your school district policy on wait time and expected boarding time. Parents should be instructed to have students at the bus stop five minutes before the scheduled time of arrival.
- Remember — if a student requires an aide, you must never leave him or her unattended.

### **Assigning Seats**

- If you are transporting a student with a disability in a large bus with general education students, don't automatically assign the student to the front seat. Typically, front seats are saved for "problem" students, and not many students want to sit near the driver. Students with disabilities are like most of your student passengers — they would prefer to sit with their friends.
- When assigning a seat to a student with a disability, consider such factors as mobility and independence of the student, needs of the student, ease of emergency evacuation, availability of dependable assistance, and vulnerability of the student during interactions with other students.

### **On The Road**

- While on the road, watch for any behaviors that might cause a dangerous situation. If aides are available, part of their responsibilities should be to make sure all students remain safely seated and secure. With or without aides, make periodic checks yourself. Knowing each student's specific behavior patterns will enable you to avoid potentially dangerous situations during transport. Before transporting any student with special needs, it is critical to understand the disability and potential behavior each student may exhibit.

### **Unloading Procedures**

- Unloading procedures are similar to loading procedures, but in the reverse order.
- Never leave students unless a parent or other responsible person is there. Since policies differ from area to area, local school district officials must establish specific procedures to follow when no responsible person is present where the student is to be unloaded.

## **MODIFIED VEHICLES AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT**

Depending on the needs of students with disabilities in each school district, various modifications can be made to vehicles and special equipment can be obtained. You will be given additional training by the local school district or intermediate unit in the operation of modified vehicles and special equipment (e.g., wheelchair securement devices, car seats, child safety restraints, etc.) you will need to use.

### **Modified Vehicles**

Because students with disabilities have a wide variety of needs, there is a wide range of vehicles available for their transportation. State law (Section 4551 of Title 75) requires modified vehicles to conform to standards set by regulations in Chapter 171 of Title 67. These regulations may be found at [www.pacode.com](http://www.pacode.com).

### **Special Equipment**

State law (Title 75, Section 4581) requires children under four years of age and transported in a school vehicle (which is a vehicle originally designed to transport 10 or fewer passengers, including the driver) must be fastened securely in a child safety seat. The law also requires children four years of age or older, but under eight years of age, must be fastened securely in a child booster seat. Always follow the child safety seat and child booster seat installation instructions, particularly for seating positions that are equipped with a lap belt only. Any children transported over the age of eight, but less than 18 years of age, must be fastened in a seat

belt. NOTE: The above provisions are for school vehicles, not school buses. The law is silent regarding school buses on this issue. If you are in a situation where you are transporting pre-school age children in school buses, follow your local school district's policies on this issue and refer to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) Guideline for the Safe Transportation of Pre-school Age Children in School Buses (<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>).

Other special equipment you may have to use includes ramps, lifts, seat belts, positioning belts, safety vests, or harnesses. Some students with physical disabilities often use wheelchairs, and a general description of the lifts and ramps used to load and unload passengers is presented below. The specific procedures for using all special equipment will be provided as a part of your local training.

**Ramps for Bus or Vans** – Some vehicles carry ramps to allow aides to manually roll wheelchairs into a van or bus or to allow students who can walk to enter without climbing steps; a combination ramp and shallow step may also be available. These should be securely stored while the bus is in motion. You may also have to secure the ramp in place on the vehicle to use it for loading or unloading. You may need to use special techniques to push the wheelchair and the passenger up the ramp and to lower them down without straining yourself (or the attendant) and without endangering the security of the student.

**Lifts** – Buses and other vehicles designed or converted to carry students who use wheelchairs are often equipped with a lift. In these cases, guide the wheelchair onto the lift platform so the wheelchair is facing outside the bus, lock the wheelchair's brakes, and secure the safety strap. Make sure the rider's hands and arms are inside the armrests. After you secure the rider, stand back from the platform at a position where you can operate the lift controls and safely hold onto the wheelchair with one hand. As the lift rises, the front kick plate should flip up to secure the front. When the wheelchair has been raised to the bus floor level, unlock the brakes and push the wheelchair inside the bus as far as you can, then secure the brakes again, and inform your passenger you are going inside the bus. Enter the vehicle, unlock the brakes and secure the wheelchair into position. Always position the wheelchair and secure it to the floor using four tie downs, a lap/shoulder belt, and the independent wheelchair seat belt, if it has one. Check with your supervisor for the correct method of tie downs.

Here are a few additional tips for working with wheelchairs:

- There are separate brakes for each side of the wheelchair – use them both.
- Always make sure the wheelchair brakes are engaged when the wheelchair is unattended and when the student is moving in and out of the wheelchair.
- Never lift a wheelchair by its arms or footrests (as they may come off of the chair) or by the wheels – always use the frame.
- Keep loose clothing away from the wheels.
- Always secure the passenger with a three-point seat belt system attached to the wall of the bus. The seat belt on the wheelchair is NOT a proper occupant restraint.
- If assisting a student in a wheelchair, don't forget to use the tilt bars, when necessary.

Note: Lifts should be operated in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations. No standees should be permitted on the lift while in operation and the operator should not be on the lift during operation.

## EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND EVACUATION DRILLS

The procedures to follow in case of a crash or any serious incident forcing you to stop and seek assistance are generally the same as those outlined in Unit H (Crash and Emergency Procedures) and Unit I (Student Emergencies). Carry a copy of First Aid procedures in the vehicle and make sure your vehicle has the required and optional emergency equipment listed and described in Unit H.

When planning emergency procedures, keep these points in mind:

- If immediate assistance is needed, contact 911 for assistance.
- Under no circumstances should you leave the students being transported.
- An able student can sometimes serve as a second-in-command in emergency situations, if an aide is not available. Consult with the parents and teachers in advance about the abilities of particular students to decide whether this would work.
- Assign those students who are blind and/or deaf to a partner who can assist them in case of an emergency.
- Because many students with mental impairments have trouble remembering, evacuation drills should be limited to simulations at the school, where school supervisory personnel can assist in performing the drill and help train those students capable of taking responsibility. Bus evacuation procedures and drills are described in Unit H.
- Ambulatory students with disabilities are evacuated in the same manner as students in general education, whenever possible.
- In a crisis, non-ambulatory students may be placed on the floor and pulled by their clothing or drag cloth out of any available exit. Ramps may be used to roll or slide students to the ground, if necessary. Contact your employer regarding training in these specialized areas.
- Students with disabilities who have been involved in a crash or an emergency evacuation should be examined by qualified medical personnel even if they appear uninjured. Refer to local guidelines and procedures regarding the notification of parents or guardians.

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