

## **MOBILITY WHEELCHAIR AWARENESS – 3<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2009**

### DO'S

- **Do** communicate with the person that you are pushing. Say where you are going.
- **Do** use light tap on appropriate shoulder to reinforce direction of turn.
- **Do** maintain a steady, smooth speed.
- **Do** warn the person in the wheelchair when tipping the chair forwards or backwards e.g. at kerbs & ramps. Offer restraint/security by placing one hand on their shoulder if required.
- **Do** make clear & distinct turns of the wheelchair at corners.
- **Do** lean down and talk to the person in the wheelchair.
- **Do** consider the person in the wheelchair when negotiating half closed doors and other obstacles.
- **Do** help to develop orientation and route learning skills by encouraging the person in the wheelchair to:-
  1. Think where they are now and then which way they should go next.
  2. Confirm the direction of turns with a signal with the appropriate hand, arm, turn of the head etc.
  3. Explore of relevant tactile landmarks & listen for travel "clues" en route.

### DON'TS

- **Don't** stop and start unnecessarily.
- **Don't** change speed unnecessarily.
- **Don't** travel in curvy non-distinct lines of travel so that right & left turns are indistinguishable from the rest of the route.
- **Don't** bump the wheelchair into obstacles or use the chair as a battering ram without prior warning.
- **Don't** ever leave the person in the wheelchair unattended in an unfamiliar environment without a clue as to where they are or what is going on.
- **Don't** bump the wheelchair down and up kerbs without prior warning.

## **GUIDELINES FOR SAFE USE OF WHEELCHAIRS**

### **TO OPEN A MANUAL WHEELCHAIR**

Grasp the padded armrest tops and pull them slightly outwards. **CHECK** if there is a lap belt at this point and make sure it is on the seat not trapped down through the side bars or arm rests. Locate the bars at the sides of the seat and push down on these until the seat is fully stretched.

If the backrest is folded down, simply lift until it is upright and the pins have sprung into the locked position.

If armrests were removed, ensure that they are secured in the armrest carriers before allowing anyone to sit down.

Ensure footplates are correctly positioned on their locator pins. They should only be locked in the forward position in front of the chair once the person is seated or if the chair is being propelled when empty.

### **TO FOLD A MANUAL WHEELCHAIR**

Clip the seatbelt together across the empty seat – this prevents it becoming trapped and twisted when the chair is folded. Fold the footplates upwards, unlock and swing them back out of the way (or they can simply be removed). Grasp the seat canvas at the centre of the front and back edges and pull sharply upwards. The chair should collapse itself inwards.

If the backrest folds - stand behind the chair and simultaneously push or pull the levers situated each side of the backrest uprights. The backrest is free to fold at the hinges.

Always ensure that the brakes are applied if you intend to lift the chair as it prevents fingers getting trapped or injured in turning wheels.

Property of The Royal Blind School

## TRANSFERRING PEOPLE INTO OR OUT OF A WHEELCHAIR

- **Always** apply the brakes before transferring - either by applying lever brakes on manual chairs or engaging wheels with power off on powered chairs.
- Lift and swing the footplates back out of the way. **NEVER USE THE FOOTPLATES AS SUPPORTS WHILST TRANSFERRING – STANDING ON THEM WILL CAUSE THE WHEELCHAIR TO BECOME UNSTABLE AND/OR TIP OVER.**
- **NEVER** push the person into or pull them out of the chair. Support the chair and allow the person to stand up or sit down themselves if able or use the appropriate hoist / St Andrews Square etc.
- Any seatbelt should be fastened and adjusted correctly so that it is comfortably tight.
- Once safely seated, the footplates should be swung round to the front making sure their securing latches have “clicked” shut. Check that any foot restrainers or heel cups are used correctly.

## PUSHING A WHEELCHAIR

- **BEFORE** moving off, always tell the person in the chair where they are going and warn them that you are about to set off.
- When making turns, try to make them as near 90° as possible.
- To make a sharp **LEFT** turn – pull on the left handle and push on the right one. To make a sharp **RIGHT** turn – pull on the right handle and push on the left.
- Reinforce the turn by touching the shoulder / arm of the person and verbally giving the direction of the turn (left or right).
- **Be aware of speed when pushing a blind person in a wheelchair.** Every movement feels quite exaggerated and a fast walking pace for you feels more like a Formula 1 race to the person in the chair. A slow walking pace is quite fast enough!

## **NEGOTIATING KERBS**

### GOING UP A KERB:

- Always approach the kerb front on and square to it.
- When the front edges of the footplates reach the kerb, push down using a foot on either tipping leaver at bottom rear of chair.
- Only tip the chair far enough to allow the front wheels to get onto the kerb. **DO NOT STOP THE CHAIR** as you want its natural momentum to help with the manoeuvre.
- Roll forward until rear wheels touch kerb and simply keep pushing using forward motion. **DO NOT** attempt to lift the chair onto the kerb as this may cause injury. If the chair does not climb the kerb easily, pull it slightly away and try again.

### GOING DOWN A KERB:

- **YOU SHOULD ALWAYS GO BACKWARDS DOWN ANY KERB OF MORE THAN 3CM OR 1 INCH.**
- Check for a safe place to cross and that you have clear access to the pavement on the other side.
- Turn the chair so your back is towards the road but so you and the chair are still on the pavement.
- Ensure that you are at a straight piece of kerb to avoid the chair tilting to one side when you go down the kerb.
- When it is safe to cross, back chair to edge of kerb & pull gently until rear wheels go down onto road, tilt the chair slightly using either tipping leaver and pull the tilted chair until footrests are clear of the kerb, lower the front castors onto the road. **IMMEDIATELY TURN 180°** and cross the road facing forwards.

## **GUIDELINES FOR TAKING WHEELCHAIRS ON PUBLIC BUSES**

At this time not all buses are wheelchair accessible – however Bus Companies continue to upgrade existing buses and introduce new wheelchair friendly buses.

- Enabled buses are either fitted with an electronic ramp that unfolds onto the pavement (ensure you leave enough pavement space for this) or the bus front lowers nearer the ground. Do not attempt to board until ramp is fully open or bus fully lowered.
- You are responsible for taking the wheelchair onto the bus and positioning it in the allocated space. (However drivers should give assistance if required).
- Ensure the chair is correctly positioned in the bay. It should be facing backwards and the back of the wheelchair up against the long cushioned head/back support.
- Once correctly positioned, any brakes should be applied and, for powered chairs, the power button should be switched off.
- Wheelchairs have priority over 'Children's Buggies'. If a buggy is already on the bus - it is the driver who is responsible for requesting - the buggy be folded and the baby/child sit with parent. This will allow the wheelchair to take space. (However, if a driver decides it is **not safe** for a baby/child to be taken out the buggy – the driver can make the decision 'NOT' to have buggy folded and decline to take the wheelchair onto the bus).
- A 'push button' which signals the driver to STOP is located on the horizontal handrail beside wheelchair space (usually coloured differently from the other STOP buttons and sometimes marked with a wheelchair symbol). When pressed it sends a different tone to the norm alerting the driver that a wheelchair user wishes alight at the next stop.

Property of The Royal Blind School