WHEELCHAIR SAFETY

**Scope**

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• Assisting the Service User When Using a Wheelchair

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• Assisting a Service User in Transferring Sideways from a Wheelchair to Another Form of Seating (Non-Weight Bearing)

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**Policy Statement**

The wheelchair supports people with their independence, comfort and their wellbeing. As an organisation, we work with outside professionals such as occupational therapists to provide the right wheelchair for the right service user that is safe and comfortable to use. Staff are fully trained to support wheelchair users and always respect their dignity and preferences.

**Policy**

Correct assessment and selection assessment of the device considering the service user’s needs (including aspects ranging from technical operation of the wheelchair to comfort and noise) is essential to ensure the correct chair is issued. As an organisation, we work closely with outside health professional such as occupational therapists (OTs) and physiotherapists when a service user is assessed as needing a wheelchair assessment or a review of an existing wheelchair.

If the service user wishes to purchase their own wheelchair, we recommend they get advice from an Occupational Therapist (OT) or Physio Therapist (PT).

When the service user is independently using a wheelchair, we ensure the following information has been received by them from the OT/PT to help avoid any accidents, preventing falls and provide other safety tips.

There are a variety of wheelchairs that are excellent for outdoor use. However, it is important to avoid certain surfaces and weather conditions. Sandy surfaces should be avoided as much as possible. Even a pavement with a small amount of sand scattered on it can cause the wheelchair to become unbalanced, spin around and tip over. This happens very quickly and mostly with power wheelchairs. To prevent this from happening try to avoid the sandy surface by going around it. Wet surfaces and puddles should also be avoided. Splashing through a puddle with the electric wheelchair can cause the entire wheelchair to become wet, slide, spin, tip and fall over. If it is raining outside, proceed with caution and at a slow pace. When using outdoor ramps in any weather condition always inspect the condition of the ramp for uneven surfaces, slippery areas, holes and other obstacles in the pathway to the ramp.

**Assisting the Service User When Using a Wheelchair**

**Assisting a service user to transfer into the wheelchair(when able to weight bear):**

• Follow the service users moving and handling risk assessment, as per care plan.

• Make sure that both brakes are on and the front casters are swivelled forwards.

• Have the wheelchair at right angles to the service user.

• Fold up both footplates and swing them to the sides and out of the way.

• If possible, get another person to hold the handles of the wheelchair, so that it will not move. If this is not possible then stand behind the chair and hold the handles yourself.

• Ask the service user to stand, then with both hands on the front of the armrests, get them to lower themselves onto the seat.

• Swing the footrests to the front and fold down the footplates. If required, assist the service user to place their feet on the footplates, with their heels well back.

• Ensure that the service user’s elbows are not sticking outside the wheelchair when going through doorways. Also, ensure that their hands are on their laps and not hanging outside the chair where they can catch in the spokes.

Assisting a Service User in Transferring Sideways from a Wheelchair to Another Form of Seating (Non-Weight Bearing)

• Follow the service users moving and handling risk assessment, as per care plan.

• Back the wheelchair so that the front casters swivel forwards.

• Make sure that both the brakes are on.

• Fold up both footplates and swing them to the sides, out of the way.

• If possible, get another person to hold the handles of the wheelchair so that it will not move. If this is not possible, stand behind the chair and hold the handles yourself.

• Ask the service user to move forwards on the seat.

• Ask the service user to place both feet firmly on the ground, slightly apart and with one foot further back.

• Ask the service user to place both hands on the front of the armrests, then get them to lean forwards with their head and shoulders over their knees to give balance. From this position, they should be able to push themselves to stand. Always encourage the service user to take their time with each step of the procedure.

**Assisting a Service User in Transferring Sideways from a Wheelchair to Another Form of Seating (Non-Weight Bearing)**

• Follow the service users moving and handling risk assessment, as per care plan.

• Place the wheelchair alongside and at 45° to the chair/toilet/bed/car that they wish to transfer to.

• If possible, back the wheelchair up slightly so that the front casters swivel forwards.

• Ensure that both the brakes are on.

• Fold up both footplates and swing them to the sides out of the way.

• Remove the armrest on the side to which the service user is transferring.

• If possible, get another person to hold the handles of the wheelchair so that it will not move. If this is not possible, stand behind the chair and hold the handles yourself.

• Ask the service user to place one hand on the remaining armrest and the other palm down, on a stable area of the surface they are transferring to.

• Ask the service user to move forwards on the seat.

• Ask the service user to lean slightly forwards, push up and slide their bottom across to the other surface.

**Assisting a Service User When Outside in a Wheelchair**

Note: The Highway Code has rules for users of powered wheelchairs and mobility scooters (Rules 36 to 46)

**Negotiating Kerbs**

Whenever possible, it is best to avoid kerbs. Instead, always try to use dropped kerbs or ramps. If a kerb is unavoidable then the following precautions should be taken.

**Pushing an Occupied Wheelchair Down a Kerb**

It is safer to go down a kerb backwards. It requires less strength and gives a gentler ride. Care should, however, be taken due to the weight of the chair and because the task involves stepping back into a road.

• Practise with an empty wheelchair first.

• Always keep the wheelchair user informed about what you are intending to do.

• Make sure the road is clear, and then back the wheelchair to the edge of the kerb.

• Ensure that the chair is lined up at 90° to the kerb.

• Slowly roll the rear wheels down from the kerb and onto the road surface, making sure that both wheels touch down at the same time.

• When the front casters are at the edge of the kerb, push down and forward on the tipping lever with thefoot while gently pulling back on the handles and at the same time. This will balance the wheelchair and its occupant on the rear wheels. Do not tip the wheelchair back more than necessary.

• Carefully pull the wheelchair further back into the road.The occupant's feet are clear of the kerb, gently lower the front to the road. Check that the road is clear before turning around and crossing.

**Pushing an Occupied Wheelchair up a Kerb**

It is safer to go up a kerb forwards; it requires less strength and gives a gentler ride.

• Practise with an empty wheelchair first.

• Always tell the person in the wheelchair what you are about to do.

• When the occupant's feet are nearly touching the kerb, push down and forwards on the tipping lever with thefoot, while gently pulling back on the handles and at the same time. This will balance the wheelchair and its occupant on the rear wheels.

• When the front casters are just clear of the kerb, push the wheelchair forwards until the casters rest on the pavement. Do not tip the wheelchair back more than necessary.

• Push the wheelchair forwards until the back wheels just touch the kerb and then lift the handles as you continue pushing forwards to place the rear wheels on the pavement. The occupant can help with this stage by pushing forwards on the hand rims (if they are capable of doing so).

**Travel Tips**

• Have the wheelchair inspected and serviced before thetrip.

• Take pictures of the wheelchair and accessories with a camera that has a date and time feature to show the condition of the wheelchair before boarding a plane or cruise ship.

• Remove leg rests and accessories from the wheelchair before handing it over to the airlines.

• Alert the airline staff that the passenger will be using a wheelchair when making reservations.

• Gather all wheelchair travel information, rules and regulations needed for the trip.

• Carry the contact information of a wheelchair repair shop located close to the destination for emergency purposes.

• Keep in mind wheelchair users are the first to board the plane and the last to depart the plane, adjust thetravel schedule to have at least two hours between connecting flights.

• Prepare to have the wheelchair completely inspected at the security gate. This includes non-removable pouches and even the seat cushion.

**Pressure Areas**

Skin condition: is the skin on any potential pressure points intact and healthy? The relevant pressure points might be the bony prominences of the bottom and hips, the base of the spine, and the back of the knees. Any areas upon which a person will lean without relieving the pressure has the potential to develop a pressure ulcer, such as on shoulder blades and elbows or forearms. If the person is going to spend significant time in the chair and they find it difficult to relieve the pressure on these areas by shifting around, a suitable pressure relief cushioning should be used.

**Information to Support an Independent Wheelchair User**

**Centre of Gravity/Tolerance**

When first using a wheelchair, the service user must become familiar with their centre of gravity. Finding the proper position is essential to their safety when using the wheelchair. In the beginning, casters may help maintain balance and stability. Practice conducting a variety of activities such as bending, reaching, and transferring in and out of the wheelchair. These movements will cause a change in the weight distribution of the wheelchair. The service user should practice and feel confident with all the movements while someone is close by, in case they need assistance while adjusting the wheelchair. It is also important to establish their tolerance for sitting or standing as this will vary from person to person.

**Bending Backward**

At times, the service user may need to reach for something by bending backwards. They should position the wheelchair as close to the desired object as possible. Use the casters so they extend away from the drive wheels to create a long wheelbase. Reach back as far as the arm will extend without changing the position that they are sitting in.

**Bending Forward**

The service user must never attempt to reach for an object if they have to position themselves forward on the seat of the wheelchair. This can be dangerous and lead to a fall. Instead, they must position the casters and extend them away from the drive wheels, then engage the wheel locks before reaching forward towards the object.

**Preventing Accidents**

Tipping and falling is the most common accidents wheelchair users encounter. Tipping can be caused by a variety of reasons, which include making the wheelchair go too fast, unlocked brakes, slippery surfaces, the sitting stability of the user, and hitting a large bump with one wheel causing the wheelchair to become unbalanced. To avoid tipping and falling, the tipping lever should be secure when needed and it is important to be aware of speed on tight corners or changes in and rough terrain.

**Safety Tips**

• Lock the brakes before getting out or into the wheelchair. For electric chairs, the power should be turned off before transferring.

• Adjust or lift footrests and armrests if needed before transferring.

• Avoid placing a large heavy bag or items on the back of the wheelchair. This can cause the wheelchair to tip backwards during transferring.

• Attach flashing taillights, reflectors or flags to the wheelchair when using the wheelchair at night.

• Avoid forcing the chair down or up staircases, slopes and inclines.

• Replace the casters regularly. If a side to side motion while going at high speeds is experienced, this is a sign they need replacing.

• On electric wheelchairs adjust and program the speed to suit the service user.

• Avoid the rain as much as possible. Wheelchairs can lose traction and the controls of an electric wheelchair can get wet. Use a suitable waterproof cover, if available, designed specifically for the model of the chair being used.

**Fall Prevention**

• Avoid leaning forward and tipping out of the wheelchair.

• Move footrests out of the way to avoid tripping on them during transfer.

• Lock the brakes before getting out of the wheelchair.

• Do not overreach for an object.

• Avoid sliding or positioning too far forward on the seat.

Maintenance and Servicing

Keeping the wheelchair in good working order is essential to its dependability and longevity. Regular maintenance should be carried out. If not Please check the service user file for contact details on who maintains service user wheelchair.

THE PROCESS WHEN REPORTING A DAMAGED WHEELCHAIR

Please call the number of the people responsible for maintaining the wheelchair and raise an incident, document in the service user file and update the communication book. Please ensure all are inform to decommission the wheelchair.

Staff must carry out daily visual checks on wheelchairs when in use, ensuring they are in good working order. Regular and more thorough checks are carried out by the person or company responsible for wheelchair safety. Please check contact in service user file. There is a service schedule in place based on the amount of use and the service user’s lifestyle.

Following the agreed care plan wheelchairs should be stored safely to ensure they do not act as a hazard to the service user or others coming into their home.

All wheelchairs should be kept clean as per the care plan.

**Powered Wheelchairs**

When a wheelchair is frequently used it is important that the battery is always charged and at the first sign of any problem, it must be reported to the relevant maintenance person or company.

Related Policies

Health and Safety

Moving and Handling

Risk Assessment

Medical Devices

Vehicle Car Scheme

Related Guidance

Highway Code:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-for-users-of-powered-wheelchairs-and-mobility-scooters-36-to-46

Gov.UK: Report a Problem with a Medicine or Medical Device

https://www.gov.uk/report-problem-medicine-medical-device

MRHA: Managing Medical Devices:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/421028/Managing\_medical\_devices\_-\_Apr\_2015.pdf

Gov.UK Occupied Wheelchairs in Cars and Private Transport – Reminders of Safe Use:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/occupied-wheelchairs-in-cars-and-private-transport-reminders-of-safe-use

**Training Statement**

All staff, during induction, are made aware of the organisation’s policies and procedures, all of which are used for training updates. All policies and procedures are reviewed and amended where necessary, and staff are made aware of any changes. Observations are undertaken to check skills and competencies. Various methods of training are used, including one to one, online, workbook, group meetings, and individual supervisions. External courses are sourced as required, Please speak to the Registered Manager.

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