

Moving & Handling Practical Sessions

Wheelchair

Pushing a Wheelchair with an Attendant

There are many variables to consider when pushing/pulling wheelchairs which make training staff to operate them safely difficult as any one situation will be quite different from another.

The variables to consider include:

- The particular client's weight
- The wheelchair design (electric/manual/light frame, etc.)
- The condition of the wheelchair (particularly wheel condition and tyre pressures)
- The floor surface the client is being moved on (rugs, thick carpets, etc.)
- Weather and surface conditions (if being moved outside) including loose gravel, damaged surfaces, wet roads and pavements, frosty or snowy conditions, muddy fields, etc.
- The gradients of the surfaces (up hills, ramps, etc)
- The capability of the handler to push/pull the wheelchair
- The distances and the time spent doing the task.

With these variables and others in mind, below are some basic tips.

When using a wheelchair, firstly ensure all clothes etc., are tucked away to avoid getting trapped, always push a wheelchair with both hands and aim for smooth and steady movements.

The majority of wheelchairs in use are of the self-propelling type, having small wheels in front and larger propelling wheels at the rear. Footplates should always be used, and a lap belt may well be appropriate depending on the wheelchair user's requirements and risk assessment content.

The main danger lies in the chair tipping forwards, causing the client to fall to the ground. This can be caused by uneven surfaces or by becoming stuck in deep chippings or soft earth. This can be easily avoided with care and observation. The risk of getting stuck, or tipping the chair forward can be reduced if a firm grip is kept upon the handgrips with a reasonable amount of downward pressure. The wheelchair user may be able to assist by helping to guide the wheelchair around uneven surfaces, and giving the handrims an extra thrust over soft terrain. It is advised for those care staff who need to move clients in wheelchairs on a regular basis practise with an empty chair first.

Up a Kerb

It is usually best to avoid kerbs, if possible use a dropped kerb or ramp. However, if this is not an option consider the following: approach kerbs ensuring the chair is squared up, and facing the edge of the kerbstone but not touching it. Place one foot on the tipping lever. Taking a firm hold on the handgrips, carefully lever the chair back until it is balanced on its rear wheels. The client may be able to assist by leaning back slightly. Propel the wheelchair forward using your body weight until the front wheels are over the pavement edge. When the rear wheels touch the kerb, push the wheelchair forward and onto the pavement.

Down a Kerb

Reversing wheelchairs and taking them down kerbs backwards may give occupants a false sense of security as the attendant's back is turned towards the road. The turn required once the kerb has been negotiated is also time-consuming and possibly hazardous. One method is to square the chair forward up to the pavement and for the attendant to place one foot on the tipping lever, firmly holding the handgrips, and raise the front wheels as previously described. The balancing point can be held on the rear wheels until it is safe to cross. Move the chair to the kerb edge and lower the rear wheels down gently against the kerb. Return the front wheels to the ground and proceed. However, many wheelchair users and attendants prefer to reverse a wheelchair down a kerb and find this is an easier move. If so, once the chair is turned and the road is clear, the attendant should tip the chair (as above). Move the chair to the kerb edge and lower the rear wheels down gently against the kerb, roll the chair slightly backwards until the front wheels can be lowered gently on the road surface. When the road is safe turn the chair to face the direction of travel.

Folding and Storage

Folding should not present difficulty if tackled properly. Always ensure that the footplates are either removed or folded up first. Most transit chairs will respond to a firm pull upwards on the seat canvas. Some have small grab-handles sewn into the seat canvas especially for this purpose. To open a wheelchair, apply pressure downwards to the side edges of the seat. The chair should open out easily. Never force a chair to open by prising the armrests, or back supports, apart. If a chair is difficult to open or fold, it may need lubricating.

Putting the Chair into a Car Boot

Ensure the boot is empty and then, having removed all removable parts from the chair footplates cushions etc., and folded down the backrest if possible fold up the chair as described above. Place a blanket over the lip of the boot, this will help the chair slide into position and reduce the risk of damage to the car. Then, having applied the brakes to stop the wheels from spinning, position the chair facing the boot, tilt the chair backwards resting the front wheels on the lip of the boot balancing it momentarily on the edge rather than

lifting it. Once in the boot the chair can be repositioned to fit the space. Avoid lifting the full weight of the wheelchair if you can. Some chairs can be almost completely dismantled in seconds, even the rear wheels being removable. There are slide sheet material bags that will enclose the chair with handles on the bag making them much easier to put into the car boot. Mechanised devices also exist that will assist with the lifting and transferring of the wheelchair.