

Manual Handling risk assessment for the movement of wheelchairs

The movement of wheelchairs is subject to the Manual Handling Regulations 1992 and as such, appropriate risk assessments must be documented relating to their use. These should include reference to the potential risks of using a wheel chair including:

- Pushing and pulling both empty and occupied wheelchairs;
- Assisting service users in or out of wheelchairs, to and from; vehicles, chairs, toilets, and as a result of falls.

Risk assessments should cover appropriate information, instruction and the need for specific training if required and be brought to the attention of all relevant staff.

Safety Checks of Wheelchairs

Prior to moving a person in a wheelchair or allowing them to get in or out of a wheelchair, the following basic safety checks should be made:

- Check that the brakes are in good working order;
- Check the wheels are free moving and secure and that tyres are suitably inflated;
- Check for splits in tyres;
- Check the stability of armrests, the backrest and the seat;
- Check footrests, ankle straps etc. where these are in place to ensure that they are in good working order and do not present an obstruction to the free movement of the wheelchair;
- Check that handles are secure and handle grips are in place;
- Check the security and condition of any accessories such as safety belts;
- In the case of electric wheelchairs, check the battery is secured in place and adequately charged.
- Check that the waist restraint straps are buckled safely when the chair is being transported or moved in any way to prevent them from falling down, trailing on the floor and causing a tripping hazard
- Ensure that the wheelchair is never pushed or pulled in the folded position – they must always be open no matter how short the travel distance.

These simple checks should form a standard part of any activity involving the movement of wheelchairs. If you have any concerns regarding the safety of any wheelchair, you should report these to your manager and if appropriate the wheelchair should be taken out of use until a repair has been completed. If the wheelchair belongs to the person using the wheelchair, they (or their parents/guardians if a young person) should be made aware of your concerns and you should give advice, if possible, on action to take i.e. not using the wheelchair, arranging for a service or repair etc.

Transportation of Wheelchairs

Teachers and Teaching Assistants may be involved in assisting students to and from a vehicle. However, employees should not assist the student in transport vehicles, this is the responsibility of the parents or driver of the vehicle.

General Information about Wheelchair condition & maintenance

Wheelchairs Purchased by the Academy

If a wheelchair is the property of the Academy, it must be; appropriate for the task, in good working order and well maintained. The regular checks referred to above should be carried out and service contracts should be in place.

Where a fault is identified or concern raised, the equipment must be taken out of use immediately and arrangements made for repair, service etc.

Wheelchairs Owned by the Wheelchair user

The condition and maintenance of wheelchairs owned by the user is the responsibility of the individual user. The regular checks referred to above should be carried out by employees each time they are required to move or assist a person in a wheelchair.

Any faults or concerns identified should be brought to the attention of the user or their parent/carer. Where appropriate, advice on action to take should be given to the user or their appointed carer and this should be documented. Academy employees must not carry out any activities using the wheelchair until confirmation has been received that it has been serviced, checked by a competent person or repaired.

Wheelchairs Provided by Health or other Similar Agency

These are the responsibility of the provider. The regular checks referred to above should be carried out by employees each time they are required to move or assist a person in a wheelchair. Any faults or concerns identified should be brought to the attention of the wheelchair user and the provider (if known). Where appropriate, advice on action to take should be given to the user, their appointed carer or the provider and this should be documented. Academy employees must not carry out any activities using the wheelchair until confirmation has been received that it has been serviced, checked by a competent person or repaired.

Issues to consider when moving or assisting a person to move in a wheelchair

A risk assessment should be in place for moving or assisting a person to move in a wheelchair, this may be specific or generic depending upon the level and nature of the risk. All employees must familiarise themselves with the contents of the risk assessment prior to carrying out the task.

Employees must not undertake any activities which they consider to be beyond their own personal capabilities i.e. because of medical conditions, pregnancy, weight or nature of the service user, weight of equipment etc. They should report concerns to their line manager.

Clothing and footwear should be appropriate for the task, shoes should be flat soled with good grip and clothing should not be loose, to reduce the risk of it becoming entangled in working parts of the wheelchair or too tight to restrict movement.

Wherever possible, manufacturers' instructions should be readily available to anyone who may be required to undertake any activity involving use of the wheelchair. In addition, the manufacturer may specify checks which are relevant to a particular model of wheelchair and these should be carried out in addition to the

points already noted above. If you have any difficulties in completing these checks report this to your line manager.

Wheelchairs should not be positioned, stored or discarded in areas where they may pose a tripping hazard or impede access or egress in the event of an emergency.

Manual Handling Techniques

Correct posture is important when undertaking any manual handling techniques which includes pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying etc.:

- The natural curvature of the spine should be maintained at all times;
- Knees should be bent if necessary allowing the thigh and buttock muscles to provide the power for the manoeuvre;
- The equipment, load etc. should be kept close to the body wherever possible;
- Extension of the arms should be avoided if possible and a good firm grip is essential;
- Twisting of the body must be avoided as this puts added pressure on the spine; Head and feet should face in the direction you are going. Tucking in the chin can improve posture particularly in the lower back.

Additional points to note when using a wheelchair:

Employees and persons using a wheelchair should have a general awareness of others who may be in the area and who may be injured by wheelchairs.

When taking or using wheelchairs outdoors:

- Pay particular attention when moving up or down ramps, slopes, and kerb edges;
- Be aware of external conditions i.e. ice, snow, rain and take appropriate action to ensure the continued safety of everyone concerned;
- Plan routes, avoiding where possible uneven surfaces, steps, gravel, wet grass etc.;
- Use appropriate exits, i.e. disabled access if possible; o Remove obstacles from doorways and porches.
- Do not carry bags and shopping on the back of wheelchairs as they may;
- Fall off and pose a tripping hazard; o Impede anyone pushing the wheelchair;
- Overload the wheelchair and cause it to topple over when unoccupied.

Remember

- Make full use of brakes, footrests and seat/lap belts,
- Never exceed your own individual capability,
- Always consider the needs and comfort of the wheelchair user,
- Familiarise yourself with risk assessments relevant to the task/activity you are undertaking,
- Pay particular attention when negotiating to access and egress routes,
- Do not allow additional items to be carried on the back of wheelchairs,
- Seek assistance if necessary.

Additional information for those handling a wheelchair

Kerbs

It is best to avoid kerbs whenever possible. Always try to use dropped kerbs or ramps. If you wish to negotiate kerbs unaided do not do it until you have had proper instructions. Ask your therapist, or an experienced wheelchair user, for help.

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 needs to be taken though as you will be stepping backwards into the road.

- Practice with an empty wheelchair first.
- Always tell the person in the wheelchair what you are about to do.
- Make sure the road is clear then back the wheelchair to the edge of the kerb.
- Pull the rear wheels carefully down onto the road making sure that both wheels touchdown at the same time.
- When the front castors are at the edge of the kerb, pull back on the handles and at the same time push down and forwards on the tipping lever with your foot
- This will balance the wheelchair and occupant on the rear wheels. Do not tip the wheelchair back more than necessary.
- Carefully pull the wheelchair further back into the road and when the 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.

- Practice 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, pull back on the handles and at the same time push down and forwards on the tipping lever with your foot. This will balance the wheelchair and occupant on the rear wheels.
- When the front castors are just clear of the kerb, push the wheelchair forward until the castors rest on the pavement. Do not tip the wheelchair back more than necessary.
- Push the wheelchair forward until the back wheels just touch the kerb and then lift up on the handles as you continue pushing forwards to place the rear wheels on the pavement. The occupant can help with this stage by pushing forward on the hand rims.