

## **INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TRAVELLING IN WHEELCHAIRS AND BUGGIES ON HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Providing safe transport for children in wheelchairs/buggies can be a complex business. Every child's needs are unique and consequently the types of equipment (seating and wheelchairs) with which they can travel safely and comfortably vary enormously.

The wheelchair user's safety during transportation depends however upon the diligence of the person securing the tie-down restraints and it is essential that they have received appropriate instructions and/or training in their use. All pupil escorts should have received PATS (Passenger Assisted Training Scheme) Training. Reference to manufacturers instructions should always be carefully followed.

The Local Authority, WYCA, individual contractors, schools, wheelchair services and parents all have an important role to play in ensuring that they observe the condition of the child whilst travelling on a daily basis and that any changes or modifications to wheelchairs or concerns over operational practices are highlighted and explored/investigated further.

This booklet is intended to provide useful information for all those responsible for transporting children in wheelchairs/buggies but is by no means an exhaustive list. The main consideration is that the pupil being transported should be able to travel in safety and with reasonable ease without due stress, strain and discomfort.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. Wherever possible the child should transfer from their wheelchair to the vehicle seating. It is recognised however that this may not always be practical or possible due to the child's particular special needs.
2. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that **ALL** passengers are transported safely and are suitably restrained. Drivers are also responsible for operating tail-lifts and ramps.

3. Pupil escorts should familiarise themselves with the above procedures (so as to be able to assist in emergency situations only) but the responsibility lies firmly with the driver and not the escort(s).
4. Drivers should ensure the good upkeep of the tracking is maintained. Tracking needs to be suitable in length to accommodate all wheelchairs and seats. A continuous length of tracking will be stronger and more flexible for positioning, than smaller lengths.
5. Wheelchairs **must never** travel facing sideways. If facing forward the wheelchair must be secured firmly to the vehicle floor (the manual brakes should be firmly applied). Rearward facing is only acceptable if the occupant's head and back can be supported by a suitable bulkhead that is built into the vehicle.

**Wheelchair Restraints:**

6. The wheelchair **must** be secured by a 4-point (webbing) or tie-down restraint system. These restraints can be used on approx 85% of wheelchairs, both manual and electric, utilising a karabiner or tongue and buckle fastening. It should be noted that the use of these restraints will reduce the capacity of wheelchairs that can be conveyed due to the space required around the wheelchair to secure it in place safely. Electric wheel chairs should be pushed on and off the vehicle and not driven under their own power.
7. The tie-down restraints should be fitted to the main frame of the wheelchair and not to any attachments or accessories eg not around the handrims or the spokes of wheels or footrests.

On some wheelchairs the point where the clamp should be secured may be indicated on the wheelchair itself (ie, picture of clamp).

8. **Specialised Restraints:** some wheelchairs require specialised, unique tie-down webbing restraints for which the 4 point/tie down restraint is not suitable. (Refer to manufacturers instructions).
9. **Passenger Restraints:** as well as securing the wheelchair in the vehicle, the occupant of the wheelchair must also be restrained independently of the wheelchair, using ideally a 3 point double inertia reel belt, or a 2 point double inertia reel belt. The following passenger restraints may be considered:-
  - Inertia Reel Lap and Diagonal
  - Inertia Split Reel Lap and Diagonal
  - Inertia Reel Lap and Diagonal plus Harness
  - Webbing Harness
  - Combined Restraint (incorporating 4 point webbing restraint plus passenger harness).

10. Lap belts supplied with wheelchairs are not sufficient for securing the wheelchair's occupant, as they are postural supports, not passenger restraints, but should be used **in addition** to the approved passenger restraints, if fitted.
11. Posture straps for wheelchair users are not suitable as seatbelts and would not give adequate protection in an impact
12. Head support, whether attached to the wheelchair or provided with the vehicle should be used during transportation to avoid whiplash injury on impact, provided crash tested and fit for purpose.
13. Sufficient space should be available around the wheelchair to enable clear access to attach, tighten and release the wheelchair and occupant tie down restraints and safety belts in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The Safety of Passengers in Wheelchairs on Buses Code of Practice VS87/1, issued by the Department of Transport recommends a spacing **of 1320 (L), 1200 - 1550mm (H) and 750mm (W)** allocated per wheelchair increasing to **1420mm (L)** when using webbing restraints.
14. Any part of the wheelchair accessories such as kerb climbers carrying baskets, kneeblocks and trays that can easily be detached (**and any other associated baggage**) should be removed and stored in the vehicle luggage compartment during transportation. This will prevent them becoming projectiles in the event of impact (including headrest if not crash tested)
15. The removal of kneeblocks needs serious consideration. There is a risk that even under relatively small deceleration forces the child's legs could be fractured. A balance will need to be made between the risks that these pose and the effect on the child of removing them for the journey. It is recommended that a multi-disciplinary assessment will need to be carried out by the Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, school and parents to come to a decision as to whether kneeblocks should be removed during transportation and stored safely on the vehicle. If removed and then replaced it is important staff are competent and trained to do so.
16. Any equipment, including schoolbags must **NOT** be hung on the back of a wheelchair at any time.
17. For power wheelchairs, restraining straps that are fitted around the battery tray and the batteries are required to secure them in position. These may be left in situ.
18. Electric wheelchairs are heavier and tend to be larger than manual wheelchairs. As well as more space being required for the wheelchair it is essential that webbing restraints are used and these take up extra

space in front of and behind the wheelchair. Clamps must **NOT** be used.

19. The carriage of wheelchairs with 'wet' batteries is not recommended and these should be replaced where possible with 'gel' batteries.
20. Wheelchairs should be so positioned within the vehicle as to leave clear access to emergency exists.
21. Unoccupied wheelchairs must be secured within the vehicle, to prevent them becoming projectiles in the event of impact.
22. **Capacity:** London style 'black cabs' can only carry one wheelchair passenger. The effect is to **reduce** the seating capacity by one passenger ie if the normal seating capacity is six, it would reduce to four plus one wheelchair due to the two flip seats being blocked by the wheelchair.

In respect of minibuses, the total number of wheelchairs plus available seats **must not** exceed the legal seating capacity stated for that particular vehicle.

23. Sometimes children may be issued with more than one wheelchair or provided with a different one as they grow or their condition changes. This is something that Wheelchair Services will report to the LA because of the possible transport implications.
24. Some parents who are not satisfied with what is offered by Wheelchair Services either buy the model they feel is more appropriate or in certain cases pay for specially modified or constructed wheelchairs. If parents choose to privately fund equipment it is important that they notify the LA of all changes because of the possible transport implications.
25. There is a large and growing range of wheelchairs/buggies that children use. Some of these have been crash tested while others are not suitable because of their lightweight construction. Where parents, schools and Wheelchair Services are aware that children should not be transported in these particular wheelchairs/ buggies they must immediately notify the LA in order that the appropriate action can be taken. Specific questions will normally be asked at the wheelchair assessment as to whether the child needs to be transported in the chair.
26. Where the LA agrees to pay for extra or specialist restraint equipment for the benefit of specific children, this will remain the property of the LA.

**NB: For the purposes of this document wherever the word "wheelchair" is used this also refers to "buggies".**

## **USEFUL CONTACTS AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Wakefield Council

Children and Young People  
Learner Support Services  
Home to School Transport Team  
Room 42, County Hall,  
Burton Street  
Wakefield WF1 2QL  
Tel: 01924 305675/305643/305481  
e-mail: hst@wakefield.gov.uk

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)  
Wellington House  
40/50 Wellington Street  
Leeds LS1 2DE  
Tel: 0113 251 7331

Community Equipment and Wheelchair Services  
Unit 10, Trinity Business Park  
Turner Way  
Wakefield WF2 8EF  
Tel: 01924 328126

C N Unwin Limited  
Unwin House  
The Horseshoe, Coat Road  
Martock  
Somerset TA12 6EY  
Tel: +44(0) 1935 827740  
Fax: +44(0) 1935 827760  
e-mail: sales@unwin-safety.co.uk  
web: www.unwin.safety.com

Crelling Harnesses Limited  
12 Crescent East  
Thornton-Cleveleys  
Lancashire FY5 3LJ  
Tel: 01253 852298  
Fax: 01253 821780

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency  
(previously known as Medical Devices Agency)  
151 Buckingham Palace Road  
Victoria  
London SW1W 9SZ  
Tel: (weekdays 9.00 – 17.00 – 020 3080 6000)  
Fax: 0203 118 9803