

Wheelchair Handling Advice



Before a wheelchair is used:

The movement of wheelchairs is subject to the **Manual Handling Regulations 1992**.

Risk assessments must be in place relating to their use. These should include reference to the potential risks of using a wheelchair including:

- pushing and pulling both empty and occupied wheelchairs
- assisting the occupant: in or out of a wheelchair; to and from vehicles/chairs/toilets and as a result of falls.

Use the link below for a sample Risk Assessment which can be adapted for a manual or power chair:

[Risk Assessment for wheelchair use](#)

Safety Checks:

- Check the **brakes** are working, **wheels** turn freely, are secure and that **tyres** are suitably inflated
- Check the **footplates** and **ankle straps** are secure and in correct position
- **If unhappy with condition do not use**
- It is not recommended that wheelchairs are used without **anti-tip bars** for primary aged children and for the majority of secondary aged children. In all cases where a wheelchair is in use without anti-tip bars, this must be risk assessed. A member of staff must not remove **anti-tip** bars from a wheelchair and parents should be discouraged to do so without first seeking advice from Wheelchair Services (if they supplied the chair) or a Physiotherapist.
- In the case of electric wheelchairs, check the **battery** is secured in place and adequately charged

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 and their parents/guardians should be made aware of your concerns, and advice given on action to take i.e. not using the wheelchair, arranging for a service or repair etc.

When pushing:

- 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.
- Adults only to push wheelchairs if self-propelling is not possible
- Raise handles, if possible, to your elbow height

To promote independence, encourage the wheelchair user to carry out the following actions if possible:

- Encourage self-propelling; even if this is only short distances
- Make sure the seat belt is fastened before moving off
- Ensure feet are on the foot plate
- Ensure arms are not outside of the armrests
- Ensure that brakes are unlocked before moving off
- Ensure the brakes are applied whenever the wheelchair is stationary

Manual handling advice:

- 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
- Clothing must be suitable for the task i.e. flat, closed toe shoes with grip
- Be aware of your surroundings, look ahead to avoid sudden changes in level and other hazards
- 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.
- Keep elbows close to body and lock in when pushing up or down slopes
- If a slope is steep consider strategies to reduce risk
- When going over door thresholds, lead with the largest wheels
- During school trips or throughout the week consider rotating staff to share the workload. Document this in the risk assessment.

Taking the wheelchair outdoors:

- Pay particular attention when moving up or down ramps, slopes, and kerb edges;
- Be aware of weather conditions and take appropriate action to ensure the continued safety and well-being of everyone concerned
- Plan routes, avoiding where possible uneven surfaces, steps, gravel, wet grass etc
- Use appropriate exits, i.e. disabled access if possible; 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; impede anyone pushing the wheelchair; cause the wheelchair to topple over when unoccupied



Kerbs

Try to avoid kerbs whenever possible by using dropped kerbs or ramps if possible. If you wish to negotiate kerbs unaided ask an experienced wheelchair user, for help.



Pushing an occupied wheelchair down a kerb

It is safer to go down a kerb backwards with the larger wheels leading. It requires less strength and gives a gentler ride. Care needs to be taken though as you are potentially stepping backwards into a 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, if possible, by pushing forward on the hand rims.

For further advice and information about accessing wheelchair skills sessions for students, please contact the Physical & Medical Team.