Safety Tips for Children who use Mobility Devices

These tips can help you keep your child safe and add to general safety advice for your child's stage of development. Use this guide to help keep your child and family safe both in and outside of your home. You know what is best for your child. Adapt these tips to meet the needs of your child and family. What works now may change as your child grows and develops.

Tips for Using This Flyer:

- Give a copy to the people who care for your child. Mark tips that may help them.
- Talk with your child's care team including your child's health care provider, school nurse, principal, teacher, school staff and other caregivers.
- Involve your child. Talk about the steps you'll take. Ask your child "what if" questions to help them learn to problem solve.
- Be a role model. Children will do what you do. If you wear your helmet, they will too.

Fall Safety

Equipment

- ☐ Does your child's adaptive equipment fit well? Do you have all the safety support gear that it needs such as brakes, belts, etc.?
- ☐ In the winter, you may want to carry rock salt in a backpack to throw on icy spots
- ☐ Help ensure that an adult or care provider knows about the rock salt and where it is stored.
- ☐ Does your child and your child's caregivers know how to use wheelchair locks during transfers? Make sure all locks are in place before you transfer your child to the wheelchair.
- ☐ Mobility aids kept in good working order can help prevent falls. Do you frequently check brakes, locks, armrests, footrests, wheels, and casters on wheelchairs?

At Home

- ☐ Do pathways provide clear access throughout your home? Are they cleared of throw rugs, worn carpet, low tables, and electric cords? (Electric cords can be taped to the floor.)
- ☐ Would items like handgrips, ramps, and padded furniture make your home easier to navigate?
- ☐ Are play spaces easy to get to? Does your home have soft surface areas for play?

Fall Safety at Home Continued

- Are carpets and rugs secured or taped to the floor?
- Do you have a nonskid mat or no-slip strips in the bathtub? A shower or tub seat with a strap may be of help.
- Do you have no-slip surfaces or strips on stairs? Do your stairway railings extend beyond top and bottom steps?
- Does your child feel confident using crutches or a walker on stairs? (Talk to your child's physical therapist or doctor.)
- Regular, safe exercise such as swimming to improve arm strength and heart and lung conditioning can help to prevent falls. Talk to your child's health care provider for recommendations.
- Help your child choose and take part in activities that fit his endurance level.
- Avoid baby walkers and top bunks of bunk beds.

At School

- Inform all of your child's teachers, school nurse and key staff about your child's needs. Discuss things like permission to use the elevator and other areas of the building. Include these in your child's IEP (Individual Education Plan) or IHP (Individualized Health Plan).

Fire and Burn Safety

- Teach your child how to stop, drop and roll with a mobility device (wheelchair, braces, etc.) or teach him how to use a blanket to put a fire out. Help your child practice getting from the wheelchair to the ground and then rolling.
- Do all adults and older children know where the fire extinguisher is and how to use it?
- Tell your local fire station about your child's evacuation needs and medical equipment.
- Teach your child to stay low in smoke. If he is not able to lower himself to the ground, teach family members how to help him get to the floor and onto a blanket. Use the blanket to pull your child away from a fire.
- Do you have a fire escape plan for your home? Does it include steps to assist your child and to transport any needed medical or mobility equipment? Talk about and practice your plan with the whole family. Include plans school, places of worship, theaters, and stores.

- Teach your family and your child's other caregivers how to help your child escape in a fire or emergency. They should know how to transfer your child from a bed or sitting position to a wheelchair or blanket.

- Include a special meeting place outside your home in your plan where all family members can meet in case of fire

Kitchen Safety

- Keep all pot handles turned to the back of the stove. It may be helpful to have your child use large handle pans and long oven mitts when cooking.

Water Safety

- Always have your child wear a properly fitted life vest when on a boat, raft, dock or near open water like lakes or rivers. A life vest with a neck collar may provide added support and comfort.

- Depending on their skill level in the water, some children should always have an adult within arms' reach in the water (even if there is a lifeguard on duty). Check with your child's health care provider about your child's level of water safety skills (i.e., can right himself, knows about deep water, can blow bubbles, etc.).

- Provide clear pathways on docks and pool decks.

- Keep electric wheelchairs away from water and turn them off.

- Have your child sit down inside a boat, not on the edge.

In the Bath

- An adult or caregiver must stay with young children at all times while they take a bath. This may change as your child grows/develops, talk to your child's health care provider about this and how to balance the need for privacy and independence in older children and adolescents.

- Mounted grab bars may provide extra support when getting in and out of the tub.

- Learn how to safely put your child in the tub without hurting your back.

Car Safety

- Many types of car seats and or adaptive devices are available to help support and safely position your child during transport. Talk with your child's health care provider about your child's needs. (See *Resources* below.)

- Work with your child's occupational or physical therapist to help fit your child into his car seat or adaptive car seat. Do not try to alter a car seat yourself.

- Your child's transport needs may change after surgery or if he has a cast. Think about and talk with your child's health care provider, physical therapist, etc., about these changes ahead of time.

- The way you transport your child will change as he grows. Some children will need the support of a restraint system even after they have outgrown a standard car seat. There are car seats that fit children who weigh up to 105 pounds.

- If your older child has trouble sitting still in a car or gets out of his seat belt, an upright vest may help. It is available from E-Z-On Products. The vest is installed in the car with the vehicle seat belts and a tether. It can also be installed in a bus. (See *Resources* below.)

- Most wheelchairs have not been designed to be used as seats in vans. Instead it is best to transfer your child to the auto seat and buckle her in a car seat, booster seat, or seat belt (this will depend on your child's size and development). The wheelchair should then be secured or stored.

- If making a transfer is not possible or your child needs the support of the wheelchair seating system, you will need to secure the wheelchair to the vehicle and secure your child with a separate seat belt that is attached to the vehicle. (See Resources below for how to secure a wheelchair in a van or bus.)

- Secure your child's wheelchair and or medical gear to the car not to the car seat or your child. You may try securing equipment on the car floor with bungee cords or seat belts not being used.

- Remove and store your child's wheelchair lap tray while driving.

- Does your child need a special car seat or harness system for the school van or bus?

Car Safety Resources

- *Car Seat Guide for Children with Special Needs,* American Academy of Pediatrics: provides information on child restraint options for children with special needs, how to use the seats, transporting older children, premature babies, and casts and wheelchairs. http://www.aap.org/pubed/ZZZXLFM0S7C.htm

- Vehicle safety for people who use wheelchairs, www.travelsafer.org/

- *Transporting Children with Special Health Care Needs (RE 9852),* American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/policy/re9852.html

- E-Z-On Products, Inc. of Florida 1-800-323-6598, www.ezonpro.com/products.shtml

- *Adapting Motor Vehicles for People with Disabilities,* U S Department of Transportation. 1-888-DASH-2-DOT or www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/adaptive/brochure/brochure.html

Pedestrian Safety

- Teach your child and family members to adjust and allow for mobility challenges for your child when you go to new places. Allow extra time to cross the sidewalk, and teach your child to ask for help.
- Are there safe places for your child to stand or sit while waiting for the bus?
- Bright colored clothing and reflective stickers on gear make children easier to see by drivers.
- If your child uses a wheelchair, does she know hand turn signals and what common traffic safety signs mean?
- Advocate for sloped curbs at crosswalks and for easy-to-hear and easy-to-see crosswalk signals in your neighborhood.

Bike Safety

- Make sure your child always wears a helmet and other safety gear when biking, wheelchair racing, using a rowcycle or handcycle or riding in other wheeled toys.
- Ask your child's therapist if you need help in fitting your child's helmet and gear.
- Find a bicycle or tricycle that meets your child's needs. There are many styles of adapted bikes and trikes that your child can try. Visit Adapted Bicycle Product List for Persons with Special Needs at, http://rileychildrenshospital.com/document.jsp?locid=1416
- Practice hand turn signals and other traffic safety rules with your child. Walk or ride with your child while he practices riding.
- Teach your child to avoid riding on busy streets and to use bike paths when he can.

Supported by the Allstate Foundation and the Washington State Department of Health, Children with Special Health Care Needs Program Adapted in part from the Diagnosis Related Injury Prevention Suggestions developed by the Ohio Dept. of Health.

Community and Children's Hospital health care providers have reviewed this handout. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

Reference: *Car Seat Shopping Guide for Children with Special Needs*, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998

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