

Devon Prison Cluster  
**Buddy Support  
Worker Induction  
Programme**

Prisoners assisting other prisoners



Assisting someone  
using a wheelchair or  
stair lift

# For both types of mobility equipment:

## You need to know:

- Health and Safety prior to and during use
- Be able to identify safe and unsafe practice
- The importance of using footrests/seat belt correctly
- Understanding the importance of your own Health and Safety
- Communication/person centred approaches

You will be asked to complete written questions on the above areas in your main workbook and complete a discussion with your Tutor/Assessor

## You need to demonstrate:

- That you can check mobility equipment prior to use
- That you can actively support someone using person centred approaches.
- That you can use safe techniques to safeguard the individual you are supporting and yourself.
- When you are using a wheelchair you can push someone safely:
  - Up and down a kerb/step**
  - Up and down a slope**
  - Over different types of flooring**
  - In and out of buildings**

You will be asked to demonstrate this in your workplace and you will be observed by your Tutor/Assessor.

# Assisting someone using a wheelchair

Wheelchairs can be used by individuals who have restricted mobility as an aid to getting around and improving quality of life. They can help in:

- Getting to Healthcare
- Going to see their visitors
- Going outside
- Joining in activities

Think about how the other modules you are studying relate to someone's independence. Using a wheelchair can promote inclusion and equality of access for example having the same opportunities as someone who doesn't have restricted mobility.

You will need to be aware of health and safety, infection control, safeguarding, duty of care, equality and diversity, awareness of the individual do they have Dementia, a Learning Disability or a Mental Health condition?

You will also need to adapt your communication, don't talk over someone as they are lower than you, so you will need to position yourself clearly to interact with them.

You should let them know what you are doing before you do it and remember it can be very daunting travelling in a wheelchair so try to see things from their perspective and don't rush.

When you are supporting someone in a wheelchair remember that it is important that the individual is in control and has choices – your role is to give active support and to encourage the individual to be actively involved in their own support and encourage independence as safely as possible.

## How can you assist?

Some individuals use a wheelchair all of the time, others may need to use a wheelchair to move from one part of the prison to another, for example to collect medication or to meet visitors.

Individuals will all have different abilities in using their wheelchairs – some will only need limited support in enabling them to be independent, others may need you to do more for them.

The individuals that you support will have been assessed by a Social Worker and if required an Occupational Therapist. It is important to refer to them and the individuals support plan to ensure that the activities that you undertake are in the individual's best interest and actively support the individuals to be independent as is safely possible.

## Health and safety prior to and during use

- It is important that you have referred to the individual's support plan – which is the most appropriate mobility aid for them?
- Where are you taking the individual? Has the activity been planned? i.e. health care appointment, collecting food. Make sure you have permission to move the individual and you have enough time so you are not rushing and distressing the individual you are supporting.
- Check the wheelchair over before using it (this is just for basic and obvious faults as the equipment will be maintained by trained wheelchair mechanics)

### You will need to look for:

- Any tears in the fabric or seatbelt – this needs reporting.
- If the wheelchair is dirty/used by more than one individual you should clean it before use where there will be skin contact (remember infection control).
- If there are any unhinged parts that could come loose this can be dangerous so check that the wheels and handles are secure as they can get worn over time, also very importantly check that the brakes work.
- It is important that both the footrests are available for use – as they are removable sometimes they are not left on the wheelchair.

## Be responsible for your own health and safety

- Are you strong enough for the task? Is the person's weight combined with the wheelchair manageable?
- Do you have any health problems that might be affected by you helping someone in a wheelchair?
- Have you planned your route to the destination? Are there any areas that are going to be difficult? Do you feel confident? Do you need extra help?
- When pushing someone in a wheelchair you must make sure your posture is good to protect your back and that you use your leg and thigh muscles instead of pushing from the core of your back.
- Keep your back upright with elbows bent and avoid stooping.
- Avoid straining your back and shoulders.
- Stay close to the wheelchair but sufficiently far so that your knees or feet don't catch on it.
- Don't ride on the back of the wheelchair – this could cause injury to both you and the individual you are supporting
- Don't push too fast as you could lose control or the wheelchair or strain yourself trying to hold it back and regain control.
- The equipment checks on the wheelchair are also important for your safety as flat tyres or unsecure handles will make it more difficult to push.

**There are a number of situations where you need to be even more careful when pushing a wheelchair and change your technique such as:**

- Going up or down a step
- Getting across uneven ground
- Getting up or down slopes
- Getting in or out of buildings

We will be looking at these areas in more detail within this booklet.

## Using the Wheelchair

### Foot rests / seat belt

These are important for safety, support and comfort. Serious injury could occur if you do not use them, as the individual's feet will drag and can get trapped.

Move them out of the way when the individual gets in and out of the wheelchair.

If there is a seatbelt available then ensure the individual puts this on, not too tight, they should get two fingers in between the belt and their body.

### Positioning

Make sure arms and legs are placed well to prevent injury in the moving wheels or being knocked against walls.

Ensure clothing or blankets not overhanging where they could get trapped in the wheels.

### Baggage

Take care with any bags, especially if heavy. These should not be hung on the back of the wheelchair as this could cause the chair to tip backwards.

### Awareness

It is easy to be distracted while helping someone else in a wheelchair. Remember to be aware of what is happening around you such as uneven surfaces.

# Handling and storing a wheelchair

## Unfolding

Place the wheelchair in front of you. Push the seat down carefully. Once fully open, make sure the chair feels secure and put in the cushion.

## Folding

First, check the footrests, turn them outwards or remove them. Take out the cushion. Stand to one side of the wheelchair. Grip the front and back of the seat and lift up carefully.

## Storing

Remove any loose parts. Ensure the wheelchair is fully folded and the brake is on. Grip it tightly, bend your knees with your back straight and lift carefully into the storage space.

# Transferring to or from the wheelchair

You may be asked to support someone transfer from a wheelchair to another place such as a bed or static chair.

**Important:** do not attempt any transfer unless the individual has been assessed by a professional and you have been instructed on how to support them in a safe and assessed manner.

## Things to think about and discuss with the Occupational Therapist or Social Worker:

- Can I manage on my own or do I need someone else to help me?
- Would a handling aid help me? (You can seek advice about this from a qualified person.)
- A slide sheet might help me as these are made of slippery material which eases sliding from a wheelchair to another seat
- A turning disc might help the person to swivel around on a chair before getting up.
- A handling belt could be useful. This is worn around the wrist with handles by the wheelchair user; they give a point of grip for the helper to assist (not lift) the user.

# Health and Safety

There are two aims at all times when helping an individual using a wheelchair user to get around:

1. Ensure they are safe and comfortable at all times.
2. Ensure that you are safe and do not injure yourself.

## Using the brakes

- Make sure they work properly before starting out.
- Use them when stopped or waiting, helping the person in or out and when parking the wheelchair.

## Securing the person

- Make sure they are ready and in the correct position, sitting back, feet on the footrests, seatbelt on (if available) before you start to move.

## Destination

- Check that you know the safest route to your destination and that you have plenty of time to get there.

## Pushing the wheelchair

- Make sure that you have a good posture.
- Hold the handles firmly with both hands.
- Keep the wheelchair close to your body so that you do not strain but have enough room to move your feet without tripping.
- Always focus on what is coming up in front of you so you can be aware of any risks such as uneven surfaces, trip hazards, pot holes etc.
- Don't take unnecessary risks as these could result in injury – such as not using foot rests, going too fast, using one hand.
- If you are tipping back, to get up a kerb for instance, do not tip too far back.
- Move smoothly, not fast and avoid sudden turns or jolts.
- If the wheelchair gets stuck, don't force it, check what is stopping it.
- Never tip the wheelchair forward!

## Going down a kerb/step

- A wheelchair should never be tipped forward when going down a kerb/step as the occupant may fall out
- It is advised that the seatbelt is used.
- Ensure the pavement is clear and that it is safe to proceed – if there are a lot of people around consider waiting until they have passed or find a safe place to undertake this task
- The safest manner in which to do this is backwards – the reason for this is that it is safer for you to control the chair, and the safety of yourself and the occupant is paramount.
- Carefully turn the wheelchair around so that the large wheels are posed at the edge of the step, keep your body close to the wheelchair so that you don't strain yourself but not so close that you can't move the wheelchair back.
- Gently lower the large wheels over the step and down to the lower ground – use the momentum of the large wheels to gently pull down the front casters – you can put your foot on the tipping lever at the back of the wheelchair to lift the casters clear of the step. Be careful do this in a controlled way as if you jolt the chair down this could be painful for the occupant and/yourself.

## Going up a step

- Visually assess the area to ensure that it is safe to proceed.
- Approach the kerb/step in a straight position not at an angle.
- Take a firm hold of both handgrips, use one foot on the tipping lever and carefully tilt the occupied wheelchair backward, so that the front castors are raised off the ground.
- Move the wheelchair forward as quickly as possible, so that momentum helps the rear wheels up onto the step.
- Use your thigh and leg muscles to aid the process. Do not strain your back. Don't struggle, ask for help if you need it.

## Getting across uneven ground

- Depending on the type of terrain it is sometimes safer and easier to go backwards so that the large wheels are going across the surface before the smaller casters, this is not recommended for long stretches or if you are on your own as it is difficult to see any hazards.
- Always make sure that you approach the uneven ground carefully and if it is too risky do not attempt it without help.

## Getting up or down slopes

- If the slope is steep it may be safer if you go down backwards as you will have more control and can use your leg muscles to steady the pace. You need to take extra care – assess the situation before hand check that there are no obstructions - keep stopping to check where you are going. It is advised that you have someone to support you if the procedure is risky and that you do not attempt if either yourself or the occupant will be put at risk.

## Getting in or out of buildings

- If there is a step refer to the section on going up or down a step.
- Even if the entrance appears flat there are often lips or door frames that you must be careful of and approach them as you would a step.
- Be careful of entrances as they may be smaller than they appear and the occupant may knock or hurt their arms so make sure you proceed slowly and carefully and the occupant has their arms positioned safely.

## Safe versus unsafe practice

### You decide...

Read through the activities below and identify which ones you believe are safe and which are unsafe.

Activity	Safe	Unsafe
Pushing the wheelchair with one or no hands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushing holding both hands firmly on the handles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Riding on the back of the wheelchair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making sure both feet are securely in the foot rests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tipping wheelchair back as far as it will go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushing with speed over uneven surfaces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communicating with the individual throughout and explaining what you are going to do beforehand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Using a stair lift safely

## You need to know:

- Health and Safety prior to and during use
- Be able to identify safe and unsafe practice
- The importance of using footrests/seat belt correctly
- Understanding the importance of your own Health and Safety
- Communication/person centred approaches

## Health and Safety prior to use

Before using a stair lift it is important to check if the individual that you are supporting has had an Occupational Therapist assessment in which the support that they require has been assessed and there are special considerations that you need to be aware of in order to support effectively.

It is important that prior to use you check the equipment over for obvious faults – a qualified engineer will maintain this so you are only looking for basic signs that it is in working order, i.e. the light comes on, the button is not broken etc. – You are not responsible for the maintenance of the equipment and you should not under any circumstances attempt to undertake any maintenance on it.

## Using a stair lift

- The user will need to stand in front of the stair lift chair and sit on it as they would a normal chair.
- Most stair lift seats swivel – so if the model that you are using does this then it's always safer and easier to access the chair (or dismount from it) when the seat is swivelled away from the staircase.
- Sitting on the stair lift seat can be more difficult for some individuals than a normal seat as it will be significantly higher (the reason the seat is higher is because the motor, batteries, transmission and electronics are all housed in the base of the seat.).
- The individual may need you to verbally guide them to the right position to enable them to feel confident and secure about lowering their body onto the seat.
- Once seated the user will swivel the chair seat so it faces across the stairway and locks in place. This is very important – there should be a safety feature that will not allow the stair lift to move if not clicked into position – but just in case make sure that this has been completed.

- The user will then need to lower the foot rest, if it isn't already down, to rest their feet on. You will need to discuss with the individual the best way of approaching this depending on their ability – some people like to have the rest down before sitting others like to sit before putting the foot rest down. The individual may need support with this. – problems or questions around individuals should be referred to the Occupational Therapist.
- The foot rest will support the user's feet and legs while protecting them from injury, should the lift hit anything on the stairway while the stair lift is moving.
- Another safety feature on a stair lift is a cut-off switch which is mounted in the foot rest to stop the lift should it come in contact with anything on the stairway. It is important to visually check that there are no obstructions on the stairs before the individual uses the stair lift.
- Stair lifts come equipped with a seat belt. It may be retractable or it may be hanging loose but it is recommended that it is used by the stair lift user to secure them on the seat in case the lift stops abruptly or the user loses their balance.
- The stair lift may have flip up arms to aid in accessing the lift. If so, the arms must be flipped down to provide arm and trunk support during use.
- The user control switch for the stair lift will normally be mounted at the end of one of the arms and out of reach if the arms are left flipped up. Some models that offer flip up arms put a cut-off switch in the arms so the stair lift won't work without the arms in the proper position.
- When the arm switch is activated the motor will rotate the gear that is meshed into the track and the chair will move along the stairway.
- The activation switch normally needs to be held down during the duration. You need to prompt the individual to do this.
- When one side of the switch is pushed the stair lift moves in one direction and when the other side of the switch is pressed the stair lift will move in the opposite direction.
- Once the user reaches the opposite end of the stairway they unlock the seat, swivel it away from the stairway (if possible) and dismount from the seat.