

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Safe Practices for Community Outings



As a Direct Support Professional, your primary job is the safety and well-being of the people you serve, while helping them develop essential life skills. Community inclusion activities are important to the growth of the individuals you support. While in the community, individuals are afforded the opportunity to realize their abilities and learn how to adapt to various situations. Safety within the community is crucial to ensure positive outcomes are achieved.

PREPARATION

It is common for an individual with a developmental disability to become apprehensive to changes in daily schedules, and unfamiliar places. Transitions from one activity to the next can be a challenge. When scheduling a community outing, it is important to implement strategies to ensure everyone is prepared for the activity.

- Schedule the outing in the daily calendar, and review it several times throughout the day.
- Provide visuals within the schedule.
- Consider creating a social story with real pictures of the place you are visiting to limit surprises and ease anxiety.
- Adhere to policies regarding staff ratios for community activities. If you do not have enough staff to support the outing, don't take the risk.
- Make sure each staff knows who they are assisting. If necessary, post assignments in a conspicuous area to limit confusion.
- Notify senior management and/or the administrator on duty where you are going and what time you will return.
- Carry a cell phone in case of an emergency.
- Know the person you are supporting. Make sure you have all necessary adaptive equipment, medication, communication devices, etc.
- Carry extra clothing, toileting supplies, and personal protective equipment.
- Identify interests and abilities of those participating in the activity. Make sure it is appropriate.
- Communicate with your coworkers, and work as a team.
- Review each person's service plan to make sure protocols and strategies are fresh in your mind.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

When transporting individuals it is the driver's and attending staff members' responsibility to efficiently operate special equipment, manage behavior and ensure the safety of all passengers.

- Do a pre-trip inspection. This includes an inspection of the vehicle as well as any adaptive equipment required.
- Plan your route. Make sure you know where you're going to avoid unnecessary risks. Consider the length of the drive. If you are transporting individuals who become anxious when sitting for long periods of time, plan an activity closer to home.
- Take special care when loading and unloading passengers. Take the time to make sure passengers are properly secured. Don't forget seatbelts—even if a person is using their own wheelchair seatbelt, you still need to make sure they also use the vehicle seatbelt. Use caution when operating a vehicle ramp or lift.
- Make sure there is staff support in the rear of the vehicle. If an individual tends to display impulsive behaviors, make sure a staff sits next to him/her. Do not seat this individual directly behind the driver.
- Minimize distractions. Make adjustments to vehicle controls—such as air conditioning and mirrors—before beginning to drive or after the car is no longer in motion.
- Emergency situations: take the necessary steps to ensure the health and safety of all passengers. If you have to evacuate the vehicle, contact appropriate management immediately, and notify local law enforcement.
- Adhere to all traffic laws and drive defensively.
- Conduct a post-trip inspection of the interior of the vehicle, and make sure each individual has exited. Do a head count!



ELOPEMENT/WANDERING

There are various reasons an individual may wander while out in the community. Every precaution should be taken to prevent elopement. Elopement is dangerous, and puts an individual at risk of trauma, injury, and potentially death.

Prevention

- Be aware: attention should be on the person you're supporting at all times.
- Do head counts periodically.
- If an individual has a tendency to wander/elope, make sure he/she is given 1:1 supervision while on a community outing.
- Staff should be informed as to the level of safety awareness an individual has. It is common for individuals with disabilities to have very limited safety awareness, and this can pose a significant risk in populated areas, or areas with a lot of traffic.
- Have each person carry a personal identification card.

If someone goes missing

- Alert first responders immediately.
- Contact appropriate management.
- Contact emergency contact persons.
- Conduct a search of your immediate area.
- Provide responders with: the person's name, physical description including any scars or other identifying marks. Sensory, medical, or dietary issues and requirements; Likes, dislikes, fears, triggers and de-escalation techniques; method of communication.
- Consider an underlying reason: Are you near an area that the individual likes? Are there food vendors nearby?
- Make sure you are aware if there is a water source or other dangerous locations nearby.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

There will be times when an individual's physical condition rises to the level of an emergency and must be addressed immediately. It is important to be aware of this possibility and to be prepared to react quickly and rationally.

- Stay calm: The worst thing you can do in any emergency medical situation is panic.
- Do not move an injured person, especially if he/she is reporting pain, unless there is imminent danger.
- Contact emergency responders immediately: Stay calm and provide your address, location, phone number, name and any information you have gathered about the medical condition.
- Assess the situation: it is important to assess the level of care needed and to be able to articulate the individual's condition to emergency responders.
- Administer First Aid and CPR If required: CPR or first aid should be performed by a person who is trained in administration. If there is no skilled person, wait for emergency professionals. Do not administer medical attention or medications. Be careful not to come in contact with blood, vomit or other bodily fluids.
- Make sure all individuals are safe and with their assigned staff member. Separate others from the situation. An emergency situation may cause a chain reaction in which other individuals' level of anxiety can escalate. Try to keep everyone calm.
- Communicate with your team. Make sure everyone knows what is going on and what they need to be doing to help with the safety of all.
- Contact appropriate management.
- Fill out the appropriate documentation for agency records.



BEHAVIOR EMERGENCIES

When an individual is engaged in behavior which poses a threat to self or others, it is important to respond and de-escalate effectively. This kind of situation can be especially dangerous when out in the community. The level of support that you may have while in program is not there when you are in the community.

- First and foremost: know the person you are supporting. It is extremely important to know triggers and warning signs that an individual's behavior may be escalating.
- Keep the situation from escalating by attending to the needs of the individual you're supporting. The more you can do to de-escalate the situation, the better chance you'll prevent an injury to yourself, the person you're supporting, or others nearby.
- Implement all preventative strategies in his/her behavior support plan. If it appears that these strategies are simply not working, it may be in the best interest of everyone to return to program in order to avoid a dangerous situation.
- Separate other individuals from the situation to avoid a chain reaction, as others' anxiety may elevate due to the circumstances.
- Remember that your role is to support and teach, not to control. The more you struggle to control someone, the more chance the person will express their frustration with a physical reaction.
- There are five major reasons an individual demonstrates a challenging behavior:

Medical: Assess whether there is a medical purpose behind each behavioral issue.

Escape: Is the individual avoiding a request, task or activity.

Attention: Is the individual seeking attention from you or another coworker?

Tangible: Does the individual want access to an item, food, or service?

Sensory: Is the individual reacting to something environmental? (Looks, sounds, feels, smells, or tastes?)

- Since you are out in the community, chances are you have no control over your environment. If you are in a crowded area, try to re-direct the individual to a less crowded space.
- Remember that the individual might not know what to do in a particular situation, so it's up to you to provide prompts and reminders to implement appropriate coping strategies.
- Protect the dignity of the person you're supporting by finding an alternative to the situation you're in.
- Know yourself: if you feel you have become frustrated with the situation switch places with a coworker. This can help de-escalate a situation as another staff may have a calmer approach.
- Call for back-up support. It may be necessary to transport an individual who is agitated separately from the other individuals participating in the activity.
- Fill out the appropriate documentation once the incident has been resolved.



Community inclusion activities are an opportunity to advocate for personal choice and the self determination of the individuals you support. Helping others maintain an active life within their community fosters independence and personal growth. It is important to always create an environment that is safe where people can continually learn and enhance their quality of life.