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Easter Seals

Creating solutions, changing lives.

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Communicating with People with Disabilities:

Proper communication with people with disabilities follows the basic rules of customer service and good manners. It is important to emphasize the person, not the disability, and to use words that accurately portray an individual person or situation. For example, say "person who uses a wheelchair" instead of "wheelchair user." Use "person who is deaf or hard of hearing" rather than "deaf person" or "hearing impaired," and "seniors" or "older adults" in place of "elderly," etc.

- It is not necessary to raise your voice when speaking to a customer with a hearing impairment. Raising your voice distorts your lip movement and makes lip reading difficult.
- Greet passengers and inform them of your bus route and destination. Announcing both the route and destination at stops served by multiple routes assists both visually-impaired customers as well as customers unfamiliar with the route, bus stop or general area.
- Always treat passengers with respect and dignity.
- Refer to landmarks or other visual cues to help the person understand direction.
- Be alert to the way the customer interacts with you and how he responds to you.
- When passengers are disembarking, alert them to any barriers or obstacles around the bus stop.
- Be willing to repeat information and break information down into smaller pieces.
- Be patient and allow the person to take her time. Respond to her in a calm, professional manner.

The ADA Shows the Way

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that guarantees everyone an equal opportunity to take part in our society, including public transportation.

The ADA requires transit systems to ensure that their personnel are trained to proficiency on how to operate vehicles and equipment safely and to treat individuals with disabilities in a respectful, courteous and efficient way.

The ADA isn't just the law—it's a way to serve all customers with respect, courtesy and efficiency. You and your passengers will all have a more pleasant ride!

Easter Seals
Project ACTION
ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY® TRANSPORTATION IN OUR NATION

Transit Operator's Pocket Guide

Get on board with good customer service!

As a bus operator, you are an ambassador for your transit system. Your excellent customer service will result in a positive experience for your passengers. It will also make your job easier! This pocket guide explains how to best serve customers with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Through the use of these tips for good customer service and safety, you and your passengers will have a safe and enjoyable trip.

Inside you'll learn about:

- Serving Customers with Disabilities
- Serving Customers Who Use Wheelchairs and Other Mobility Devices
- Serving Customers Who Use Service Animals
- Pre-Trip Accessibility Inspection
- Priority Seating
- Calling Out Stops

It's easy to provide good service to customers with disabilities; follow these tips on communication and assistance:

General Guidelines for Serving Customers with Disabilities

All customers, including those with disabilities, expect good, safe service.

- Treat customers with disabilities as you would like to be treated.
- Customers with similar disabilities often need different types of assistance in order to travel independently.
- Remember that a person's disability may not always be visible to others.
- Don't make assumptions about a customer's abilities or disabilities.
- Ask customers with disabilities if they need assistance. Don't automatically assume they do.
- Do not touch customers or their mobility devices without their permission.
- Speak directly to customers with disabilities, not their companions.
- Speak clearly with a normal tone and speed, unless the customer requests otherwise.
- Any passenger may use the lift if he cannot climb the steps of the vehicle.
- Be prepared to provide assistance with the use of lifts, ramps and securement devices if the customer needs it.

Customers also have responsibilities when using public transportation, and should:

- Tell drivers if they need help and explain the assistance that is needed.
- Know their destination.
- Pay the fare.
- Control their service animal at all times.
- Know whether their wheelchair or mobility aid will fit on the lift or in the securement location on the bus and meets the ADA definition of a common wheelchair.
- Be prepared, if able, to assist the bus operator to safely and quickly secure their mobility device.

Serving Customers Who Use Wheelchairs and Other Mobility Devices

- Each mobility aid is unique. Do not make assumptions about how one is operated.
- All people using mobility devices as defined in the ADA are to be allowed to ride. The ADA defines a "common wheelchair" as a three- or four-wheeled device that does not exceed 30 inches in width and 48 inches in length measured 2 inches above the ground, and does not weigh more than 600 pounds when occupied.
- A common wheelchair is not required to have brakes or any other equipment.
- Transit agencies may require that customers using wheelchairs ride in designated locations.
- You may recommend that a person using a wheelchair transfer out of her own device into a vehicle seat. The final decision on whether to transfer is up to the customer.
- You may recommend, but not require, that people using wheelchairs use the seatbelt and shoulder harness.
- You have the responsibility to know how to secure mobility devices on your transit vehicle so that you can do so if requested or if required (according to company policy). Operators may not deny transportation to a rider whose common wheelchair is difficult to secure.
- Transit agencies can require mobility devices to be secured if that is within the agency's policy.

Serving Customers Who Use Service Animals

- People with various types of disabilities use service animals, such as trained dogs.
- While some service animals wear special collars or harnesses, others do not. If you are unsure that an animal is a service animal, you may inquire if the animal is a pet. If the customer responds that the animal is a service animal, you may ask what tasks the animal has been trained to perform.
- You cannot require special identification for a service animal, inquire about a customer's disability, or ask for a demonstration of the tasks that a service animal has been trained to perform.
- Operator or passenger allergies or fear of animals are not valid reasons for denying a ride to a customer using a service animal.
- Never touch or talk to a service animal without asking the owner's permission. Service animals are working animals!
- Service animals must be allowed to ride with their owners. Passengers with service animals may not be required to sit in a specified area.
- A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove his service animal from the bus unless the animal is not under the owner's control or the animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

Pre-Trip Accessibility Inspection

- Be sure that lifts, ramps and all aspects of stop announcement systems are in working order. Cycle lifts and make sure you can operate the lift manually.
- All belts, hooks, locks and straps should be clean, free of defects and in working condition, and the vehicle should be equipped with the appropriate number of these items.
- The floor and securement tracks should be clean of any debris or dirt that might make securement difficult.

Priority Seating

- When a person with a disability boards your bus and needs to sit in a seat or occupy a wheelchair securement location, you must ask individuals in that location to vacate their seat, unless that individual using designated priority seating is also a person with a disability.
- If the person in a priority seating area or wheelchair securement location refuses to leave her seat you are not required to force her to move.
- Know your agency's policy on priority seating.

Calling Out Stops

The ADA requires bus operators to:

- Announce stops at all major intersections, transfer points and major destination points. Be sure to know what stops your company has identified as stops that should be announced.
- Announce stops at sufficient intervals along a route to orient a person with a visual impairment to the vehicle's location.
- Announce any stop requested by a passenger.
- Announcements can be made personally by the vehicle operator or mechanically by a recorded system.