



A handout from...

**The Rehabilitation Engineering
Research Center on
Wheelchair Transportation Safety**

Talking about wheelchair transportation safety with your clients who use wheelchairs

This fact sheet is an aid for Occupational and Physical Therapists and others who help consumers choose manual and power wheelchairs and scooters. The following “script” may provide a model for how to start this conversation about transit safety. Most of your clients will need your encouragement and help with locating resources. Therapist and suppliers are often responsible for helping wheelchair users begin to think about securing their wheelchairs to the vehicles they travel in and using crash-tested safety belts and occupant restraints.

How did you get here to your appointment with me today?

1) "I used Paratransit to get here."

a) Did you have your wheelchair tied down?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: “That’s great, how many tiedowns were used? Which ones?”
(Stress the importance of using all 4 tiedowns during transit every time.)

Client: No.

Therapist: “Did they have tiedowns?” If there were tiedowns available, the therapist should stress the importance of asking to use the 4-point tiedown system. If there were no tiedowns available, this is illegal, and proper authorities should be notified.)

b) Did you use a seatbelt (occupant restraint)?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: “That’s great.” Now there is an opportunity to explain the difference between an occupant restraint and a positioning belt. Positioning belts are not adequate for occupant restraint.

Client: No.

Therapist: This is an opportunity for the therapist to stress the importance of the use of occupant restraint systems.

2) "I used the bus to get here."

a) Did the bus have working wheelchair tiedowns?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: That's great.

Client: I don't know.

Therapist: This is an opportunity for the therapist to explain the importance of using tiedowns – and of the rider's right to ride safely and to have his w/c tied down.

Client: No.

Therapist: "This is serious. Federal law mandates the use of tiedowns on buses. I'll report this."

b) Did you ask to have your wheelchair tied down?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: "That's good. How many tiedowns were used?"

If 4 were used – that's perfect.

If only 2 were used, this is suboptimal. The client should be encouraged to ask for all 4 tiedowns to be used. It is their right to be able to ride safely!

Client: No.

Therapist: This is an opportunity for the therapist to stress the client's right to ride safely. It is important for wheelchair users to use a 4-point tiedown system every time they take a bus.

3) "I used a personal vehicle and sat in my wheelchair as a seat in the car or van to get here."

a) Do you transfer into a regular seat when you travel in your van?

b) (When the answer is "No") If you are staying in your wheelchair and using it as a seat in this van, do you have a way to secure your wheelchair to the floor and keep yourself seated in the wheelchair in the event of a crash?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: "What type of securement and occupant restraint system do you use?" (Make a note in the client's file.)

Client: No.

Therapist: "That's not so safe. Let's get you set up with a wheelchair tiedown and occupant restraint system."

c) Do you use a seatbelt (occupant restraint) while sitting in your wheelchair as a seat in your car or van?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: "That's great." This is an opportunity for the therapist to explain the difference between an occupant restraint and a positioning belt that goes across the client's lap. Positioning belts are not adequate for occupant restraint.

Client: No.

Therapist: This is an opportunity to stress the importance of using an occupant restraint system. "Let's get you set up with a real safety belt system."

4) "I used a personal vehicle, but I transferred from my wheelchair to a vehicle seat."

a) After you get into a passenger seat, do you secure your wheelchair in the back of the van or car?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: "That's great."

Client: No.

Therapist: This is an opportunity to explain the risks of an unsecured wheelchair moving around in an open area of a van. At the least it will be a distraction. In the event of an accident, it can become a source of injury or a projectile etc.

b) Do you use a vehicle seatbelt (occupant restraint) while riding in your van or car?

Client: Yes.

Therapist: "That's good." In the event of crashes, seatbelts have been proven to prevent injuries and death

Client: No.

Therapist: This is an opportunity to stress the importance of using an occupant restraint system whether it is for a vehicle seat or wheelchair used as a seat.

For more information on wheelchair transportation safety, visit www.ercwts.org



Last updated: January 2008