

Accessible Customer Service for Emergency Responders

An Emergency Management Ontario E-Learning Utility

Tips for Interacting with a Person with a Mobility Device

Approach & Introduction

- Terms such as “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound” are inappropriate. Using a wheelchair does not mean confinement.
- When greeting a person who uses a wheelchair, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands with that person even if he or she has upper extremity limitations.

Communication

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone in a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.
- When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider weather conditions, distance, and physical obstacles such as curbs, inclines, declines, etc.

Behaviour

- Respect the person’s personal space. Do not lean over the person or on his/her assistive device.
- Do not move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the person’s reach.
- Always ensure that the person’s wheelchair goes with them.
- Wheelchair users are trained in special techniques to transfer from one chair to another. Depending on their upper body strength, they may be able to do much of the work themselves.

Physical Contact

- A person using a mobility device may be able to negotiate stairs independently. One hand is used to grasp the handrail while the other hand is used for the crutch or cane. Do not interfere with the person’s movement unless asked to do so, or the nature of the emergency is such that absolute speed is the primary concern. If this is the case, tell the person what you’ll need to do and why.
 - Ask if you can help by offering to carry the extra crutch.
- Do not touch assistive devices without the person’s permission. If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, remember to:
 - Wait for and follow the person’s instructions.

- Confirm that he or she is ready to move.
- Describe what you're going to do before you do it.
- Avoid uneven ground and objects.
- Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.