

WHEELCHAIR MOBILITY

For those students who have the ability to move their own wheelchairs, they need to develop the skills to propel and steer in most directions as well as manage slightly inclined surfaces and co-ordinate brakes. At times it may be slow when getting from point A to point B in the chair, but when there is something of interest and motivating, the pace of wheel propulsion is often increased. In the early stages of power mobility, practice should be conducted at school under direct supervision of the school physiotherapist.

Developing Manual Wheelchair Safety

Some suggestions for helping students work on the safety aspects of pushing their own wheelchairs are:

- work in directions through a game (e.g., Red Light, Green Light with the student on his/her own or with other students with payoffs and clear commands for moving and stopping.
- have the student move up to adults and/or peers, stopping using the word/sign for stop, followed by praise for stopping.
- in gym have the student move when other students are moving and stop when they are stopped using a whistle or voice command.
- provide your student with praise for stopping, then 'hand over hand' help to correct the direction.



Although power mobility is another option for some students, it is important to consider a number of factors when deciding which form of mobility would be more “functional” and easily accessible for your student when a teenager and later an adult. To do this, one may want to ask oneself the following questions about **Power versus Manual Mobility**.

If your student is not able to use a power wheelchair safely and independently at the moment, the option may be reconsidered again in the future should skills change. The following things need be addressed/worked on to help him/her get ready.

Questions/Issues To Consider For Power Mobility

- Is your student's vision good enough for him/her to drive a power wheelchair? This should be assessed.
- Your student might need a head support and/or chest straps to help keep his/her head up so vision is at an optimum.
- Does your student demonstrate willingness to stop when asked? (e.g., understand the issues of basic safety for self and others.)
- Does your student have the physical ability to use a joystick with controlled movement in all directions? (e.g., forwards, backwards and to both sides)
- Does your student have the ability to "STOP" and/or take his/her hand off the controls quickly?
- Where is your student going to do the driving? Do modifications need to be made for safety and/or access?
- How will the wheelchair be transported, from where to where and how often?
- Where will the wheelchair be stored? (School insurance may need to be checked to see if it can be left overnight in the school and under what conditions.)
- How and where will the battery be charged and who will be responsible for this?
- Regular maintenance plus emergency repairs is a family responsibility. Set up communication and a plan to help this work.