



# Best Practices for Special Needs Transportation

## A QUICK REFERENCE FOR DRIVERS OF SPECIAL NEEDS VEHICLES

It can take a lot of patience and understanding to work with special needs students, but it can also be a very enriching experience. The job is demanding yet rewarding as you gain the appreciation and respect of those you serve and in turn, you can learn a great deal from students with special needs and from their families.

STEO understands that as a driver, you are committed to the safe and comfortable transportation of all students. To be effective, it is important that drivers have an awareness of the unique challenges faced by students with special needs to support them in a climate of respect and caring.

These guidelines provide a general summary of best practices related to specialized transportation. More detailed information is available in the STEO Standards of Performance. If you have any questions or concerns around the protocols or procedures for specialized transportation, you should address them with your employer right away.

### Safety Considerations for Specialized Vehicles

- All vehicles must be equipped with a two-way communication device.
- Take care to operate the vehicle smoothly and carefully, to avoid jarring or shaking. Students may be highly sensitive to overstimulation, including sudden or jarring movements, loud music/shouting, strong scents, close proximity, et cetera.
- Drivers must never give food or drink to a student or allow students to consume food or drink in the vehicle, to prevent choking and anaphylaxis reactions.
- Never leave a passenger who is lost, confused or unable to communicate alone. Should this situation occur, notify your supervisor immediately and follow their instructions.

- When arriving to pick up a student at home or at school, if the student does not show up, you should contact dispatch immediately to ensure the student's safety. Ensure you have had contact with someone at home or at school before the school vehicle leaves the area.
- Vans are required to display signage on the back stating "School Children being Transported" or similar messaging and the company name on both sides of the vehicle. The route number must also be displayed on the vehicle, ensuring that the driver's vision is not obstructed.
- Student medical forms/safety action plans must be kept in a binder or folder and located at the driver's station on the school vehicle. The medical forms must be kept confidential and visible to the driver only. The operator must also keep a copy on file in a secure and confidential location. All forms must be removed from the vehicle and stored securely at the end of the work day.
- Drivers can complete the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Training at <http://www.respectedwork.com/accessibility/steo/>

## Required Gear for Vehicles Transporting Special Needs Students

- Contact information, medical/action plan information and emergency phone numbers
- Seat belt cutters to release seatbelts or restraining straps in an emergency
- Length of rope for students to hold onto during evacuation
- Blanket or tarpaulin to spread on ground in assembly area
- Skid cloth to pull or slide student along school vehicle aisle to exit (Wheelchair Vehicles)
- First Aid Kit in case of injuries
- Blanket to cover students if required
- Axe or glass break apparatus to assist in evacuating the school vehicle if required
- Reflectors to alert other motorists
- Misconduct Book to report student misconduct/concerning behaviour to the school
- Log Book to record daily vehicle inspections
- Fire Extinguisher
- **AN ABUNDANT SUPPLY OF SMILES, WARMTH AND ENTHUSIASM**

## **Student-Driver Relations: Communication is KEY!**

At the beginning of the new school year or when new special needs students are assigned to a route, bus companies are encouraged to schedule a discussion with the school principal to review and discuss the transportation needs of individual students. It is important that the driver communicate regularly with their supervisor, the student's parents and the school to ensure the student's needs are being met. Personal information shared with transportation personnel regarding the needs of any student is considered confidential.

The attitude of the driver will have a significant impact on student-driver relations. It is important that the driver is sensitive to and knowledgeable about the needs of the students they transport. The driver should fully appreciate that disability or special need is not synonymous with illness and that the types of needs will vary from student to student. Special care should be taken to communicate with students in a positive and kind manner, recognizing that the student may not be able to communicate back in 'traditional' ways (e.g. verbally). Attempt to provide a secure transit environment in which the student feels relaxed.

- Set the Rules/Expectations – be clear but adaptable as relates to your expectations
- Keep an Open Mind – everybody experiences the world in their own unique way
- Be Firm – but demonstrate compassion
- Be Patient
- Be Consistent
- Report any concerning actions in detail to the principal or principal designate

If belts or safety vests and tethers or tie-down systems are required, drivers must ensure students remain secured in the seat assigned to them for the entire trip. Heavy articles such as school bags must be placed in a safe storage area.

Wheelchair vehicle or van pick-ups and drop-offs should be made in front of the residence, so that students are not required to cross the street. Ensure that each student is delivered to the care of a responsible guardian at both the school and home. In the event a responsible guardian is not available, the driver shall radio dispatch for instructions.

More detailed information about the transportation of students with special needs is available in the STEO Standards of Performance.

MAY YOU BE PROUD  
OF THE WORK YOU DO  
THE PERSON YOU ARE  
AND THE DIFFERENCE  
YOU MAKE

Driver Name:	
Driver Signature:	
Date:	