

PRE-MOBILITY TRAINING GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are designed to develop and improve pre-mobility concepts. These are the skills necessary to drive a power wheelchair. Individual needs, deficits, motivations, and learning styles should be considered in training. Most students learn best with frequent, short lessons.

1. Positioning.

Make sure the student is positioned as well as possible. This will optimize physical function.

2. Vision

Make sure the student has adequate vision and visual perceptual skills to safely regard the environment and move through it. Seek intervention in this area, if needed.

3. Stop and Go concepts.

Your student needs to understand Stop and Go concepts. This includes discriminating between moving and being still as well as causing movement and stopping movement.

- When you are moving your student (i.e. pushing their manual wheelchair), let them know it (i.e. “we are moving”, “go”). Also verbalize stopping. You can reinforce this with games such as Green Light, Red Light.
- When you are driving a vehicle with the student as a passenger, verbalize the movement of the car. “The light is red. I stopped. The light is green, I’m going.”
- If your student has any independent mobility (such as crawling, gait trainer), you can work on stop and go causal concepts by again verbalizing their own movement for them (i.e. “you are going!”, “you stopped”). Playing games using their own movement is very helpful.
- If your student does not have independent mobility, try a switch toy, particularly a car-type toy. The student can press the switch to make the toy “go” and “stop”. Power wheelchairs, when driven by switches, require a sustained switch closure. When using switch toys for pre-mobility training, do not use a Switch Latch and Timer, which allows intermittent switch closures to operate the toy. Intermittent switch closures are great for training switch scanning (i.e. to access a communication device).

4. Directional concepts.

Even if your student does not understand left and right, they need to understand how to make a wheelchair move in an indicated direction.

- First, work on a basic understanding of directions. Standing in front of the student, point out an object to their left. Verbalize that the object is on their left or “over there”. At this point, the student needs to understand the direction of an object relative to their own position. Ask the child to look at objects in various positions in a room and point to the objects if able.
- When you are moving the student in their manual wheelchair, verbalize your turns (i.e. “here is the corner, we are turning left” or “here is the doorway, we are going to turn into the doorway”).
- When you are driving a vehicle with the student, verbalize the direction you are moving the car in. “Here is the store, I’m turning left, into the parking lot”.
- If your student has any independent mobility, verbalize the direction they are moving in (i.e. “you are going straight”, “you are moving to the table”). Ask them to move toward an object or play Follow the Leader.
- If your student does not have independent mobility, use these concepts with a switch toy. Verbalize what directions the toy is moving in.

5. Judgment

A big part of using a power wheelchair is judgment. How fast is safe in this situation? Do I stop when someone steps in my path? When there is no curb cut, what should I do? At the pre-mobility concepts stage, emphasize safety and judgment whenever appropriate. When pushing the client in their manual wheelchair, verbalize these issues. “I have to push you slower now, there are a lot of desks in this class”, “I had to stop pushing you because someone walked in front of us” and “I have to go around to the driveway, going off the curb is not safe”. These issues can be verbalized in the car, as the student crawls at home, or when using a switch toy.

6. Real time practice

The manual wheelchair or adaptive stroller base can be used to develop mobility concepts.

Place 3 round pieces of paper or actual switches on the manual wheelchair tray (or in other locations that meet the client's needs) for Forward, Left and Right directional control. Start with only Forward. Once the client understands that this 'switch' moves the mobility base Forward, try adding one directional switch. Then add the third. Only place these during Driver's Training. When the student touches the Forward paper or switch, the trainer pushes the wheelchair forward. When the student lets go, stop. Make sure to push the chair exactly how the student is pressing these locations, even if this means bumping into objects (just bump gently).

After your student has mastered pre-mobility skills, power mobility can be re-evaluated and more advanced mobility skills can be developed.

For more Resources, check out:

Power Wheelchair Criteria – Indoors
Power Wheelchair Criteria – Outdoors
Mobility Training Guidelines

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