



Manual for the Specifics of Communication and Interaction with People with Physical Disabilities in Emergency/Disaster

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1. Typical specifics of people with physical disabilities

Physical disabilities have many forms. It can be people with congenital limb and torso motor impairment, people with mobility disabilities after injuries, people with limited mobility due to their age, lying patients, people with different levels of self-care, and various compensatory means (dentures, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs).

Some may have a **simultaneous involvement of speech and mimicking muscles** (laics can sometimes confuse the symptom with drunkenness or mental retardation).

Due to the frequency of combined disabilities, here are some guidelines that apply to people with physical disabilities.

Physical disability does not affect the understanding of the communicated, but if we want to establish trust, it is good to provide these people with maximum possible comfort.

Only some people experience a **combination of mental and physical or sensory impairment**. The character of the need for help differs in these people as well as their self-service capabilities.

Immobilized patients: Each movement is the will of the other person, but the ability to perceive it is retained. They are physically the most vulnerable.

Long-term lying patients have chronic problems, sensory deprivation, whole body pain, bedsores, sensitivity of sensation is preserved. The decisions are often "about them without them". Do not underestimate communication with them!

2. Guidelines for communication and interaction with people with physical disabilities

We apply the same basic principles as with people with cognitive and perception difficulties:

- It often helps **to ask** the individual how to **help with transport** and what his specific needs are.
- To stabilize people it helps to **provide information** (timely, reasonable and true) and contact and communication with close persons. We arrange contact with a close person.



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- When communicating with a person with physical disability, we **always keep his human dignity and respect**.
- We offer help, **ask** what we can do and what the person can do it selves.
- We **strive for the individual's own activity**, we do not overtake his own competence.
- We adapt to his abilities.
- We **do express sorry** for the person, **we respect differences** in movement. Disabled have often learned to live with their disabilities.

3. Specific recommendations:

- We treat the person as any other person.
- A physically handicapped person may appear to be mentally disabled even if he is not. We have to verify the state of disability and always maintain the human dignity.
- We ask what an individual **can do it selves** and how we can help.
- We let the disabled person tell us, how to deal with him during transport.
- Beware of increased **bone breakage** or **muscle weakness** - inappropriate handling is a risk of injury.
- Some people do not hold the body without support.
- For wheelchairs, follow the **wheelchair user's recommendations**.
- Wheelchair handling - **fold and unfold a wheelchair**: apply brakes, remove cushion (if any), adjust the footrest, rotate them out or remove them, hold the midpoint of the seat at the front and back, pull upwards and fold the wheelchair. To unfold push the seat. Beware of finger injuries when handling.
- **Transport of wheelchair down the stairs**: 1. Take the wheelchair in a frontward manner down the steps; 2. Grip the handles firmly and tilt the wheelchair, balancing on the rear wheels; 3. Move the wheelchair to the top of the first step; 4. Use your body as brake while gently lowering the wheelchair; 5. Control the descend with your body, keeping the rear wheels tight against the stair edge and roll the wheelchair forward and down the step; 6. Don't let the chair drop unevenly or too quickly. A second person helps at the front of the wheelchair. We can carry a light person with the wheelchair down the stairs.
- Getting **up the stairs** likewise (the wheelchair is back to the stairs).
- On uneven, stony or sandy terrain we carry a wheelchair with a person **backwards**. (When pushing forward, the wheels crash).
- If we want to drop a person out of the wheelchair, we have to **ask how** we can grasp him or her.
- Before setting a person on the wheelchair, we apply brakes and remove the armrest.
- Electric wheelchairs are heavy (weighs 100kg or more), so we transport them better without the wheelchair user. The motors can be disconnected and the wheelchair can be pushed mechanically.
- When moving from an electric to a mechanical wheelchair next to it, the armrests can be removed.
- The **necessary width of the toilet door** should be ensured as well as the height of the washbasin.

