

Special Needs Bus Driving

What You Need to Know

REFERENCE GUIDE AND TEST

Produced by Video Communications

INTRODUCTION

I) Transporting special needs students can be an extremely difficult job. It is a job that requires both physical and mental work. It requires you to drive the bus in a manner that keeps students comfortable and safe. It is a job in which the students look up to you as a role model, a teacher and a friend. It is a job in which constant communication proves to be invaluable. It is a job in which all the students on the bus look to you the special needs bus driver.

II) In the video we cover these topics. We paint a broad picture of what's expected of a special needs bus driver. We cover the daily roles and responsibilities that special needs drivers have and the duties that they entail. The video is broken down into 3 sections.

Roles and Responsibilities of a Special Needs Driver

Driving Skills when Transporting Special Needs Students

Additional Issues, Procedures and Practices

Part 1: Roles and Responsibilities of a Special Needs Driver

1) Special needs bus drivers will run into a variety of challenges on a daily basis. Many of the students being transported will be physically handicapped and will require that you perform many physical tasks. Some students will have emotional and/or behavioral issues and require structure and routine. Many of these students require that the driver operates the bus in a manner that will not injure students with physical disabilities. The special needs driver is the one that makes this all happen.

2) Your overall goal as a special education driver is to provide safe and efficient transportation so that students can take the fullest possible advantage from district curriculum and extracurricular activities.

3) You should take the time to better understand students disabilities to react accordingly if a behavioral or health issue may arise. The students I. E. P. is one way of obtaining this information. However, I.E.P. procedures and policies differ. You can also use additional resources such as online forums and special education sites can offer more insight to specific disabilities.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

4) I.E.P. stands for *Individualized Education Program*. An IEP is the legal document that defines a child's special education program. The I.E.P. team is a formal group that designs a student's educational program and establishes goals and objectives. If it is determined that a student needs specialized transportation as a related service, many schools invite transportation staff to participate in the I.E.P. process and serve as an additional resource.

5) In the video we show an I.E.P. meeting. We introduce the importance of transportation officials being present in the I.E.P. due to the student having particular needs. ***The I.E.P. is a way for transportation officials to make sure they are addressing the transportation needs of both the student and the parent.*** Receiving pertinent information from the parent of a special needs student is invaluable information to have. This information can be applied to better ensure a safe and care free ride for the student.

ROLES

6) Special education bus drivers, must operate special equipment, manage student behavior, administer health care and serve as a seating specialist in positioning and securing devices and occupants. In addition, you are a guardian, teacher, driver and friend.

7) One role that special needs drivers will double as, is as an ***emergency worker***. If the school bus needs to be evacuated, it is you that will need to understand and implement a thorough and swift evacuation of all students on the bus. Wheelchair students obviously are going to take more effort and time to unload, so a seating chart that would allow the most efficient type of evacuation should be created. You must understand and be able to perform emergency evacuations of the special needs bus.

8) Special needs bus drivers are also ***parents and rule enforcers***. They are responsible for maintaining student behavior on the school bus. You should take the extra time to find out all you can about a student's emotional or behavioral disability. There are several behavioral techniques to be applied. You just have to figure out certain ones that work with certain students or types of behavior.

9) But the most important role to play to these students is their friend. Special Needs students crave routine and structure on the bus, but they also crave the attention of their

bus driver. They crave the ability to communicate with their driver on a personal level.

RESPONSIBILITIES

10) Special needs bus drivers often need to use the wheelchair lift and tie down wheelchairs. This responsibility often follows your districts procedures. However, you must understand everything that goes into loading a wheelchair student and securing the wheelchair on the bus. This includes:

- a) Checking the wheelchair for defects or damage*
- b) Operating the lift*
- c) Loading and unloading students*
- d) Tying down wheelchairs on the school bus.*

11) Wheelchair lifts stick out from the bus. For this reason you must be cautious about the placement of the bus. At schools there can be students around. At homes, you have to be careful of cars and other obstacles. Never leave a lift unattended. And always secure the bus when loading or unloading special needs students.

12) It is also the responsibility of the special needs driver to make sure the bus is in good running condition. That means you will need to do a daily pre trip of the school bus. Your pre trip will exceed that of a regular ed. bus driver due to the extra items that must be checked. These include:

- a) The wheelchair lift*
- b) wheelchair tie downs*
- c) necessary medical equipment*

13) It is important to take the pre trip inspection extremely seriously. And to always keep in mind the extra items that need to be inspected on the special needs bus.

Part 2: Driving Skills When Transporting Special Needs Students

1) The first thing that you must realize as a special needs driver is that many of the students you are transporting will often have low muscle tone. They also lack the ability to control body movements. Therefore, ***you must drive the bus with Tender loving care.*** There are several techniques you can apply to do this.

2) In the video, we give a demonstration of a trainee who is placed in a wheelchair that is secured to the bus. The trainer in the video has the trainee place her feet on a coffee can to give the trainee an idea of what a student with low muscle tone may feel when the bus is in motion.

3) What the demonstration proved is how the bus driver had a hard time keeping her balance when the bus went too fast over a speed bump. This can happen when the bus comes to an abrupt stop, or even taking corners too aggressively. These are the types of sudden movements that should be avoided. Physically disabled students cannot react to this type of motion as a regular ed student can.

4) You will be making many stops everyday. Stop signs, traffic lights, vehicles as well as drop off and pick up points are many of the areas you will be stopping at. When using the brakes on the school bus, you should apply them in a way that will bring the bus to a nice smooth stop. This will lessen the chances of injury to a physically disabled student.

5) You should always try to look ahead and anticipate stops. This will allow you more reaction time and thus give you more time to slow the bus. **Remember, school buses are heavy and it will take longer to slow them than if you were in a typical automobile.**

6) **When approaching a stop**, you should **apply the brake smoothly**. Right as the bus is coming to a stop, you should **lift on the brake ever so slightly to bring it to the smoothest possible stop**. Then continue holding until you are ready to go.

7) When turning corners, be sure you know the right turning point for the bus you are operating to make the smoothest turn possible. And be sure to **go all the way through the turn slowly**.

8) You should also look ahead for speed bumps, pot holes and pedestrians when transporting special needs students. By paying close attention you can react to them and have a chance to slow the bus or avoid the obstruction entirely. And you should **avoid making ANY sudden movements** that may jerk students around.

9) It is important to always use T.L.C. (*Tender Loving Care*) driving skills when transporting special needs students. Their physical safety depends on it.

Part 3: Additional Issues, Procedures and Practices

Parent not present to pick up student

1) In the video we show the issue of a student who's parents have not shown up to pick up their special needs child. Here are several options that can be used:

- a) Call in to dispatch and have them call the home of the student.
- b) Go to a pre arranged site that parents and school officials agree upon in the event that no one is available to meet the student at their original drop off point.
- c) Circle back to the students original drop off point after completing your route.
- d) Return to the home school and drop the student off. The student should be kept at the school until the parent is available to pick them up. And still if there is no response from the parent, the school then can contact child protective services for help.

2) It is important to note that every school district has different procedures for dropping off students when parents are not available. Be sure to follow your districts procedures and policies.

Manual Lift Operation

3) The lift on the school bus is obviously used to load and unload students. But what happens if the lift stops working? If this happens, you will have to manually raise or lower the lift.

4) In the video, we give a demonstration of how to manually operate the lift. **Make sure that you read the instructions for the lift that is on your bus to properly lower and raise it.**

Personal Safety

5) Personal safety is important to maintain when tying down wheelchairs or simply driving the bus. Consistent bending and ratcheting can be bad for your back if done in the wrong matter.

6) You should make sure that you are in a comfortable position and bend with your knees while tying down wheelchairs. Try to keep the natural curvature of your spine throughout

the process. This will help to prevent a back injuries when tying down wheelchairs. Also, when loading, unloading or simply moving the wheelchair, keep it close to your body. **Let your legs do the work, not your back.**

Communication

7) It is important that you stay in close contact with the people that surround the student daily. You should communicate with the school to note any changes in routine. The same goes for the students' parents. Constant communication with these parties can hold crucial for a safe bus ride for the student. Make sure the to keep in communication with your transportation director, as well as school staff, teachers, parents and any person that could alert you of any physical or mental changes to the students well being.

CLOSING

There is a lot or physical demand and responsibilities when transporting special needs students. The video covered several issues pertaining to special needs safety. It also covered the basic roles and responsibilities you assume when taking this job. And now it is up to you, the special needs bus driver to take on these duties with a positive and aggressive approach.

TEST QUESTIONS

- 1) Driving a special needs bus is essentially the same as driving a regular ed. bus.
TRUE or FALSE

- 2) It is important to take the extra time to find out about a students disabilities or needs.
TRUE or FALSE

- 3) There are additional items that need to be checked on a Special Ed. bus as opposed to Regular Ed. bus. **TRUE or FALSE**

- 4) It is okay to leave a wheelchair lift unattended as long as it is for a short period of time.
TRUE or FALSE

- 5) When approaching a stop, you should:
 - a) **look ahead and anticipate stops**
 - b) **apply the brake smoothly**
 - c) **lift on the brake ever so slightly to come to the smoothest stop**
 - d) **All of the above**

- 6) you should avoid making ANY sudden movements that may jerk students around.
TRUE or FALSE

- 7) You should follow your districts procedures and policies when a parent is not present to pick up their child. **TRUE or FALSE**

- 8) Your health and safety is just as important as the students you transport.
TRUE or FALSE

- 9) It is unimportant to communicate with the school to note any changes in routine.
TRUE or FALSE

- 10) When loading and unloading wheelchairs, you should make sure to use your back to help with the pushing and pulling methods.
TRUE or FALSE

ANSWER KEY

1) FALSE

2) TRUE

3) TRUE

4) FALSE

5) d

6) TRUE

7) TRUE

8) TRUE

9) FALSE

10) FALSE