



WHEELCHAIR PROCUREMENT, MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING

by PT SIT Team

Obtaining appropriate seating and positioning solutions for students is key to ensure their success in the school, at home and in the community. It is a complex and time-consuming process for parents to navigate medical insurance and attend doctor and vendor appointments. DOE therapists should provide suggestions and guidance for parents in this process. Therapists should consider the following:

- Physical changes in the student
- Upcoming surgical or other medical interventions
- Environmental considerations
- Family lifestyle
- Family involvement
- School participation and independence

Considerations for ordering or modifying wheelchairs:

- The school OT and PT's are resources for the parents. They can provide guidance with the ordering process and in managing their child's equipment needs. Therapists should familiarize themselves with the most up-to-date knowledge regarding wheelchair technology to better assist their students.
- Department of Education OTs and PTs may attend wheelchair clinic appointments with permission from their on-site administrator and clinical supervisor. Therapists may contribute information regarding the student's school routine and how proper seating and positioning can help optimize his/her learning experience. If the therapist is unable to attend the clinic appointment a letter stating any concerns and/or recommendations would be helpful. The therapist could also call the clinic prior to the appointment to establish who will be seeing the student and discuss concerns directly with that person.
- Remember that a wheelchair is considered "durable medical equipment" that will be used by the student in the school environment, at home and in the community. Therefore, it is not an IEP-driven piece of equipment. A parent may require an explanation that, should the doctor and the wheelchair clinic ultimately recommend a wheelchair, funding must come from their medical insurance.
- Please note that writing letters of justification for health insurance companies and the actual ordering of wheelchairs or major parts of a wheelchair is beyond the scope of NYC DOE school-based therapists. Although input can come from school OTs/PTs, the final letter/ordering should be done by the wheelchair clinic therapist based on his/her findings and recommendations.
- School-based therapists should perform minor wheelchair adjustments as needed, e.g. tightening screws, adjusting lateral supports, adjusting footrests. For repairs (other than minor adjustments), the therapist must inform the parent to reach out to the vendor or wheelchair clinic. The therapist should guide the parents in this process if necessary.
- Please do not hesitate to call your clinical supervisor if you need any assistance.

Students whose families are experiencing problems with funding or who are having difficulty following through on the process may be helped by being referred to "Resources for Children With Special Needs," an advocacy group which can connect children to social service and other agencies. Parents may call (212) 677-4650 directly (bilingual help is available) or go to www.resourcesnyc.org.

Wheelchair Maintenance and Monitoring:

The School Therapists should obtain the below information from student, parents and/or equipment clinic:

- Existing wheelchair vendor name and number
- Year chair received
- Overall condition of wheelchair
- Student's wheelchair clinic
- Referring Physician (with parental permission)
- Outpatient physical therapist or outside service providers (with parental permission)

Basic maintenance (including maintaining cleanliness) is typically the responsibility of the consumer, that is, the student or parents/guardian. The wheelchair vendor and the specialists at the student's equipment clinic are also involved in maintenance and repair. In many cases, school-based therapists perform basic maintenance relating to the student's safety and functional use of the wheelchair in the school. Within the school environment, teachers and classroom staff often report to the therapist maintenance needs. Discuss with your onsite administrator obtaining basic tools for use in school. Therapists who need further assistance should feel free to contact their clinical supervisor.

Suggested tools:

- Set of wrenches (socket and open end) (Make sure it includes 3/8", 5/8", 7/16", 1/2", 3/4" wrenches)
- Adjustable wrench (approx. 10" long)
- Allen wrenches (also called Hex Keys) - a standard and a metric set
- Screwdrivers - Flat head & Phillips head
- Vice grip (approx. 7" long)
- Assortment of nuts, bolts, and washers (a helpful selection should range from 3/16"-5/16" shank width and 1/2"- 2 1/2" in length)
- Measuring tape (approx. 8' long)- flexible recommended
- Duct tape (for temporary fixes, has long term drawbacks)
- Spray lubricant (e.g. WD40, white lithium grease, graphite or silicon spray)
- Small mallet
- Strong needle and thread
- Zip ties
- Pliers
- Ratchet set

For the purposes of this manual, maintenance includes regular "servicing" of the wheelchair to ensure proper running order and necessary repairs to keep the wheelchair functioning safely. Safety Checklist is recommended to use by all school staff members (including therapists, teacher, paraprofessional, and student). **All safety issues should be addressed as soon as you notice them.** Please be aware that any chemicals or lubricants requires proper storage and use. Check with school custodian for the Material Safety Data Sheet, MSDS.

Daily	All school staff members (including therapists, teacher, paraprofessional, student) should check: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the student appropriately positioned in wheelchair?• Are the brakes too loose?• Are the chest harnesses too high or near the neck?• Are seatbelt secure? (Note that students with harness still needs to secure their seatbelts)• Are there rough, exposed part of wheelchair frame that can be dangerous for child or school staff?• Are anti-tippers present and in appropriate position to prevent wheelchair from tipping backwards?
-------	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the seat back and seat base properly fastened to the frame? If they slide easily forward/backward/sideways, the bolts/screws must be tightened to prevent this movement.
Regular servicing	<p>Generally every 3 months or as needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tightening of loose screws and bolts • Checking for brake function and for worn surfaces • Lubricating moving parts (including wheel casters, wheel caster mounts and axles)
Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoring any parts of the wheelchair to working condition. • Simple tools listed above may be used by school-based therapist to do some basic repairs, for example: Replacing lost nuts, bolts, or screws, Reattaching a torn seatbelt, Replacing a bent lateral trunk support with a spare one • Other repairs can't be done in school either because you may not have the right tools or because a part is broken and needs replacement. Please contact parent and vendor.

Power Mobility Maintenance:

General maintenance of the wheelchair motor and operation should be fully serviced by a vendor once a year. If the student develops difficulty using the joystick, the sensitivity should be adjusted by the wheelchair vendor to make it easier for the student to operate. The maximal speed of the wheelchair can also be adjusted by the vendor if safety is a concern. For repairs and maintenance beyond the scope of school-based therapists, such as bent wheels, broken parts replacement, student has outgrown the wheelchair and removing and washing the seat cushions (not basic cleanliness) the parent should be contacted immediately. If you notice a problem developing, contact the parent right away and ask them to contact the clinic or vendor. Therapists may assist the parent in contacting the vendor to ensure the problem is resolved. The repair process can take weeks or months. If it is a safety issue, make sure that the vendor is made aware so that it will get top priority.

Power wheelchair needs to be charged every day or two, depending on its use:

- If the student goes to and from school in the wheelchair, it will be charged at home (overnight) and this should be the responsibility of the caregiver.
- The chair may be left at school overnight in which case it will need to be charged at school. It is important to identify one person in the school who will primarily be responsible for charging the wheelchair (i.e. teacher, paraprofessional, or therapist). You may be asked to provide training to staff on the subject of charging and the operation of the power wheelchair.
- Each power wheelchair should come with its own charger which should be labeled and identified. To charge a power wheelchair, follow these steps:
 - Make sure the chair is turned off.
 - Plug the charger into the power wheelchair (usually under the seat or in the back)
 - Plug the charger into the electrical outlet.
 - If the charger has an on/off switch, turn it on.
 - The charger should turn itself off when the batteries are charged. If not, contact the vendor.
 - To unplug the power chair, reverse the steps above.
- Power wheelchair batteries should not go below half charge. This will affect the life of the batteries. If batteries are draining in less than one day with normal use, please contact parent so they can contact the vendor for battery replacement.
- In case of battery failure, every power wheelchair can be converted to a manual wheelchair by disengaging the motor drive from the wheels. Familiarize yourself with the location of drive wheel release to allow you to manually push the wheelchair. There are also manual brakes which should be used when the wheelchair is in manual mode.