

Assisting Persons with Disabilities in Emergency Situations

Flight Centre Travel Group (Canada) Inc. (the “Company”) is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities. Emergencies can occur suddenly and without any advance warning. It is important that all employees are familiar with the company’s policy on the Workplace Emergency Response, especially when assisting persons with disabilities.

Since not every emergency situation is similar or predictable, every person should rely on and use their best judgment when offering assistance to others in an emergency, without putting their own or other people's safety at risk.

Some Types of Disabilities

Mobility

Mobility limitations may make it difficult for a person to use stairs or to move quickly over long distances. These can include reliance on mobility devices such as a wheelchair, scooter, walker, crutches or a walking cane. In addition, people with a heart condition or various respiratory difficulties can experience certain levels of mobility limitations.

Vision

Vision loss can include a broad range of conditions ranging from complete blindness to partial or low vision that cannot be corrected with lenses or surgery. A person’s ability to read signs or move through unfamiliar environments during an emergency may be challenged, creating a feeling of being lost and/or being dependent on others for guidance.

Hearing

A person can be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. The distinction between these terms is based on the individual’s language and means of communicating rather than the degree of hearing loss. In an emergency, the method in which emergency warnings are issued becomes critical to how a person with hearing loss is able to respond and follow instructions to safety.

Non-Visible Disabilities

- Non-visible disabilities can include communication, cognitive, sensory, mental health, learning or intellectual disabilities, or disabilities resulting from a medical condition, in which an individual’s ability to respond to an emergency is restricted. Individuals with non-visible disabilities may have difficulty performing some tasks without appearing to have a disability.
- Respiratory disabilities may affect a person’s ability to walk long distance and perform tasks that require excessive physical activity, such as evacuating a building. These limitations may be exacerbated by smoke, dust, fumes and chemicals.
- Speech disabilities, such as difficulties with articulation, voice strength, language expression, or total loss of speech, will affect a person’s ability to communicate during an emergency.
- Cognitive disabilities may affect a person’s ability to respond to emergencies in the following ways: memory loss, problems with orientation, distractibility, perception and difficulty thinking logically.

- Mental illness or mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour which may be exacerbated in an emergency situation.

Tips on Helping a Person with a Disability

- Do not assume the person cannot see you, or that they need your help. Avoid approaching the person from behind. Do not touch the person, their service animal and/or their assistive device/equipment without their permission first – try to get the person's attention via a visual cue before speaking to them. Do not make loud noises as hearing aids amplify sounds and can create a physical shock to the user.
- Ask first to ascertain if the person needs or wants your help. Allow the person to identify how best to assist them and to describe what help they need from you. Face the person and make eye contact when speaking to them as they may rely on speech reading. Communicate in close proximity. Speak clearly and naturally and provide specific and precise directions. Use gestures to help explain the meaning of what you are trying to communicate to the person. Write a message if there is time, or try tracing letters with your finger on the palm of their hand. Be patient, and repeat instructions if needed.
- To guide the person, offer them your arm instead of taking theirs and walk at their pace. Keep half a step ahead of them. Provide advance warning of upcoming stairs, curbs, major obstacles, or changes in direction. Watch for overhangs or protrusions the person could walk into. Ensure that the person's wheelchair goes with the person. Employees should accompany the client with a disability to ensure their safe evacuation.
- Follow instructions posted on medication, special needs equipment and/or assistive device. Ask the person about their medication and if they need any help taking it. (Never offer medicines not prescribed by their physician.) As some people may be more susceptible to infection, use latex free gloves to reduce spread of viral infections.
- Avoid attempts to lift, support or assist in moving someone unless you are familiar with safe techniques.
- Never administer any food or liquids to an unconscious or unresponsive person.
- Ask the person if areas of their body have reduced sensation and if they need you to check those areas for injuries after a disaster.

Tips on Helping People with Disabilities during an Emergency

Visual Disabilities

- ✓ Announce your presence, Speak naturally and directly to the individual
- ✓ Ask the person what kind of assistance they need
- ✓ Describe the action needed to be taken in advance
- ✓ Describe any obstacles in the path Let the individual take your arm for guidance, do not grab them
- ✓ After evacuating a person with a visual disability to a place of safety, do not leave them unassisted
- ✓ If the person has an assistive animal, plan for the animal to be evacuated with the person
- ✓ Do not pet or feed an assistive animal while it is on duty

People with Cognitive and Learning Disabilities

- ✓ Accompany a person with a cognitive or learning disability because they may be confused by emergency instructions and signs for evacuation Use simple directions
- ✓ Be patient - the more severe the disability, the greater the response time will be
- ✓ Be prepared to bodily remove the person from danger if they are unable to respond to instructions
- ✓ Communicate with them in a calm manner

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- ✓ Flick the lights when entering the work areas of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing to get his/her attention
- ✓ Use pen and paper; write slowly and let the deaf or hard of hearing person read as you write
- ✓ Make sure the person has understood the urgency of the message
- ✓ Be patient
- ✓ Face the person directly and speak naturally for those persons who can lip-read
- ✓ Provide the individual with a flashlight for signaling his/her location if he/she is separated from the group evacuating and to facilitate lip-reading in the dark

People with Mobility Disabilities

- ✓ Always ask the person what is the best way to assist them
- ✓ Do not hold onto a person's wheelchair, as it is part of their personal space