Challenges in Transporting Children with Special Needs on School buses

Lifesavers, 2017

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Objectives

• Review basic principles of transportation of Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN)

• Discuss proper restraint choice and use for CSHCN

• Discuss common problems in transporting CSHCN

• Identify resources
Who are children with special needs

- Children with special health care needs are those who have or are at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally. (Ref)
Consider this child...

- Almost 4y girl with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy
  - Increased tone in the arms and legs
  - Decreased tone and strength of the neck and trunk
  - Gastrostomy for feeding
  - Incontinent of bowel and bladder
  - Wheelchair for mobility and transport
  - Weight 25 lbs. and 36 in. tall

- Transported by school bus to preschool
Principles of safe transportation

• Overarching goal is to transport the child with special needs in the safest and most effective way possible
• Safety of all passengers is essential
• Essential to safe transportation is a well-constructed action plan
Principles for transporting children with special needs

- Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers should always ride in a Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) on a school bus
- CSRS should be appropriate for weight, height, physical, behavioral, and developmental needs

Appropriate child safety restraint system

• The best CSRS is the one that:
  – Fits the child (size, age, development, and medical needs)
  – Fits the school bus seat
  – Used correctly EVERY time (NHTSA)

Appropriate child safety restraint systems

• Conventional car seats (rear facing, forward facing)
  – Installation requires seat belts that meet FMVSS 208 and 209
  – Next to window, max space 24”
• Large medical seats
  – Consult manufacturer
  – Installation requires seat belts and tether
  – Lose seat behind (if tethered to seat belt)
School bus specific add-on CSRS

• Require seat mounts per manufacturer instructions
  – Fit for child
  – Securement

STAR special needs, IMMI

BESI Pro-Tech
Safety vests/harness for use on school buses

• Travel vests useful for children with behavioral problems
  – Use cam wrap for securing to bus seat
  – Use crotch strap to prevent submarining
  – Follow manufacturers instructions for fitting child
Integrated seats for school buses

• Forward-facing CSRS with 5-point harness built into the bus seat
  – Easy shoulder height adjustment
  – Check manufacturer recommendations for maximum height and weight, and storage when not in use
  – Make sure driver and assistants are trained in use of seat
Sometimes the most appropriate selection is the child’s wheelchair

• Any child who can transfer from the wheelchair should be properly restrained on a school bus seat.
  – Wheelchair and equipment should be properly secured
Sometimes the most appropriate selection is the child’s wheelchair

- Proper securement of a child in the wheelchair requires:
  - Transit option wheelchair
  - Four point tiedown devices or acceptable equivalent
  - Positioning straps as needed
  - Federally approved occupant restraint system
  - Lap boards, trays removed and secured
  - Medical equipment properly secured as per the school bus, wheelchair manufacturers recommendations
Common problems in transporting children with special needs on school buses

- Communication during IEP and other planning meetings
- Understanding the medical, physical, social, and transportation needs of a child with special needs on a school bus
- Using the appropriate child occupant restraint for age, size, development, and medical needs for the child
- Aides on the bus to assist with transfers, positioning, securing, and monitoring child on the bus
- Preparing for possible emergencies on the bus route and how to obtain timely assistance, including evacuation
Communication is essential!

- CSHCN who are entitled to transportation:
  - should have an Individual Transportation Plan as part of the IFSP/IEP document
    - Specifies if a seat belt, child safety restraint system, or wheelchair is recommended.
    - For planning transportation, representatives of school transportation services and other school staff with appropriate knowledge and expertise should be included in the meeting.
It takes a village to transport a child with special needs

Needs advanced thought and planning by a team of the medical home, the school home, and the family home before attending school.

- patient
- caregivers
- physician
- school nurse
- therapists
- Specially trained CPSTs
- school bus driver and aide
- school district representative
- transportation director
- school leadership
- school psychologist

Susan Jordan, Principal, Amy Beverland Elementary School, January 26, 2016.
Assistance on the school bus

- Aides on the bus can assist with loading and unloading, transfers, positioning, securing, and monitoring child on the bus
  - May need special training for specific conditions
  - Provide rescue medications or actions for acute exacerbations of medical conditions
  - Help identify when Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are needed and provide support until EMS arrives
On-board emergencies—action plans are important!

• Every child with special needs must have an emergency action plan

• Should be a part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
  - Acknowledge the medical issues (behavioral, breathing problems, seizures, bowel or bladder, mobility)
  - Anticipate emergencies (asthma attack, seizure, bowel or bladder accident, behavioral meltdown, or a fall)
  - Health care professionals need to provide a written plan for medical emergencies
“The devil is in the details!”—developing action plans


Resources for safe transportation of CSHCN


  - http://wc-transportation-safety.umtri.umich.edu/ridesafe-brochure

- Search for CPST with school bus and/or special needs training at https://cert.safekids.org
Resources for safe transportation of CSHCN

• Automotive Safety Program, Riley Hospital for Children, Indiana University Health: http://www.preventinjury.org/Special-Needs-Transportation

• American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement on school bus transportation of children with special needs to be published 2017
Summary

• Overarching goal is to transport the child with special needs in the safest and most effective way possible

• Safety of all passengers is essential

• Essential to safe transportation is a well-constructed action plan

• Include all stakeholders–patient, caregiver, physician, school nurse, therapists, school bus driver and aide, school district representative, transportation director, school leadership, school psychologist

• Choose the appropriate child safety restraint system for that child

• Adjustment of bus route to ensure that the bus is within reasonable distance to an EMS facility.

• Key is planning ahead with a child passenger-centered team, knowing limits, outlining care plan, good communication