

# Driving with a Disability

## Special points of interest:

- What is needed to obtain a driver's license when you have a disability
- Wisconsin resources for prospective drivers
- Obtaining vehicle adaptations
- Notes for parents
- Notes for school districts

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- Wisconsin Services

## Getting Started: Ready-Set-Go

You are 16 years old and you want to get a driver's license like everyone else in your class but it is not that easy for you, you have a disability. You know you will need special supports, but how to begin? Though every school district has its own policies and procedures, in general, to receive support from your high school you will need to follow the 5-step process below.

**1. Determine your eligibility** for special education services. If you have an IEP, you know you are eligible, and in fact, are already receiving services.

**2. With your IEP team**, which includes your parents, determine if you should enroll in your high school's driver education (DE) classroom instruction, DE simulation lab, and/or DE behind-the-wheel.

**3. If you have a motor or sensory disability**, your team will probably recommend an assessment to determine if you need special equipment to drive. Several places in Wisconsin conduct driver assessments and are listed elsewhere in this publication.

• If special equipment is needed you will have to work with your school's DE instructors to determine if the special equipment can be used with the DE cars. If it is not practical to do that, the district will seek other ways for you to com-



Enjoying your independence while driving Wisconsin's scenic highways.

plete the behind-the-wheel component of driver education.

- If you decide to use your family's vehicle so the equipment is installed on the car you will practice on, contact your insurance agency to make them aware of the situation. The school district and your insurance carrier should determine who will provide insurance coverage while using your vehicle for driver's education.
- The school is not required to purchase the special equipment for you.

**4. Take the classroom instruction** in the least restrictive environment possible. It is best to take it with your peers because the experience of the group is as instructive as the formal curriculum being taught. However, be aware that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction does not require a special license for DE teachers. If you need

special modifications to the instruction, advocate for yourself, and with your IEP team, clarify these modifications for the DE instructor. Keep in mind:

- Shorter instructional sessions and more of them might work best for you.
- You may want to repeat the class before you take the written driver's test. This is not the area of knowledge and skills you want to come away short on. Will the school district let you do this or will you have to take the second class in the community?
- Ask that all modifications you currently receive in other classes apply to the DE class as well.

**5. If you are 18 or over**, contact your area vocational rehabilitation program for assistance, especially if driving will be necessary for achieving employment.

## Role of School Districts in Adaptive Driver Education



School districts must offer adaptive driver education instruction if regular DE is offered.

Wisconsin school districts are not required to provide driver education instruction including behind-the-wheel instruction. While many school districts do provide driver education many do not. To determine whether a school district has any responsibility for providing driver education for a student with a disability, one first has to determine whether the district provides driver education for the general student body.

Any school district that offers driver education (DE) to the general student population must also offer it to students with disabilities, or contract with outside agencies to provide similar instruction to these students. A district should consider several factors when deciding to offer adaptive DE in-house: the driving potential of the student(s) in question, the amount and type of adaptive equipment required, the feasibility of installing that equipment on district DE vehicles, and if there are instructors knowledge to teach use of the equipment..

**Student potential:** Not all students will have the potential to drive due to limitations created by their disability. Many motor and sensory disabilities can be addressed through the use of adaptive equipment but

many cannot. Cognitive and learning disabilities may also limit a student's potential for driving. Potential and adaptations that increase potential should be investigated through an assessment. Several resources for driver education assessments are included in this publication. Beyond ability, though, an additional question must be asked: will the student have the opportunity to drive when they get a driver's license? This question must be pursued with the parents or guardians, or possibly a case manager or DVR counselor.

**Assessment:** School districts must cover the cost of the driver education assessment. Finding a qualified person or agency to conduct the assessment is important. The assessment not only helps determine the student's potential but whether the district has the necessary resources to provide appropriate DE instruction.

**Inclusion in the IEP:** If a student has the potential to be a successful driver but needs specialized instruction or adaptive equipment, these must be noted in the student's IEP. To make the best decisions about the approach to DE, the following people should be considered as IEP team members: special education and driver

education teachers, parents or guardians, therapists, physicians, equipment vendors, and personnel from the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The IEP should include who is responsible for providing each component of the DE instruction and when periodic reviews will occur.

**Adaptive equipment:** The nature of any adaptive equipment should be understood by the IEP team. Many types, such as simple hand controls, can be incorporated into most vehicles by the dealer and can be installed in the school's DE vehicles. Others are more complicated and require decisions about which vehicle they will be installed in. The family's vehicle should be considered if the family plans to purchase the equipment (the school is not required to buy adaptive DE equipment). A person qualified to install it should be identified. The company providing the adaptive equipment should provide instruction to the student (as well as family and DE instructors) on the operation of the equipment before DE instruction begins.

*(Adapted from the guidelines provided by Randal Thiel, DPI Traffic Safety Consultant)*

## The Freedom to Travel

***"A driver's license is a ticket to freedom but it takes careful practice and a sense of responsibility to achieve it." (Drower, 1998, p. 54)***

While most Americans think little about traveling, choosing from the many options that fit the need, individuals with disabilities often have limited choices, especially if they want to travel independently. To address the needs of individuals who would like to drive, AAA, a leading travel

and safety company, has produced a book titled *The Disabled Driver's Mobility Guide* (2000). It was developed for disabled drivers facing the sometimes difficult task of finding equipment and services to improve their mobility. The book compiles many national and state resources

for evaluation, vehicle modification, driver training, and related services.

**AAA  
Traffic Safety Department**  
MS 76  
1000 AAA Drive  
Heathrow, FL 32746-5063  
Website: <http://www.autoclubgroup.com/wisconsin/welcome.asp>

## Resources in Wisconsin and Neighboring States

The following companies provide mobility services in Wisconsin. Some of the services provided are listed. For complete information, contact the company.

### Resources in Wisconsin

#### Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute

University of Wisconsin – Stout  
PO Box 790  
Menomonie, WI 54715  
715-232-2379  
<http://www.svri.uwstout.edu>

- Evaluation services
- Vehicle modifications
- Driver training

#### Bruno Independent Living Aids

1780 Executive Drive  
P.O. Box 84  
Oconomowoc, WI 53066  
800-822-8183

- Vehicle modifications

#### ISP Associates

150 Dale Drive  
Oregon, WI 53575  
608-835-0015

- Driver training
- Evaluation services
- Foot and hand controls
- Information services

#### Meriter Hospital—Park

Occupational Therapy  
202 South Park Street  
Madison, WI 53715  
608-267-6173

- Driver training
- Evaluation services

- Foot and hand controls
- Information services
- Van modifications

#### Other Wisconsin Resources

- County Departments of Vocational Rehabilitation—to find your local office go to <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/locations/>
- Independent Living Centers—to find your local center go to <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/Disabilities/Physical/ILCs.htm>
- Occupational Therapy departments at local hospital

#### Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Bureau of Driver Services  
<http://www.dot.state.wi.us/drivers/drivers/aging/disability.htm>

- Driving with a disability website

#### Department of Public Instruction Contact

Randy Thiel  
Traffic Safety Consultant  
Department of Public Instruction  
PO Box 7841  
Madison, WI 53707-7841  
608/266-9677



Several outside resources are available in and around Wisconsin

#### Resources in Neighboring States

Courage Center  
3915 Golden Valley Rd.  
Minneapolis, MN 55422  
763-588-0811  
[www.courage.org](http://www.courage.org)

Gresham Driving Aids, Inc.  
30800 Wixom Road  
PO Box 405A  
Wixom, MI 48096  
(Also in Kalamazoo, MI)  
800-521-8930

- Evaluation services
- Vehicle modifications

Disability Resource Center of Southwest Michigan  
517 E. Crosstown Parkway  
Kalamazoo, MI 49001  
(269) 345-1516  
(800) 394-7450  
<http://www.drccil.org/>

- Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist
- Evaluation services
- Driver training



Do you have limited reading proficiency? Do

you want a driver's license but know you will have trouble with the written test? There is a solution for you. The Wisconsin Driver Handbook and test are available on audiotape. Contact the WI Department of Motor Vehicles. Email: [dotdriverhandbooks@dot.state.wi.us](mailto:dotdriverhandbooks@dot.state.wi.us)

## Car Companies May Offer Financial Assistance

Many major car manufacturers have mobility service centers across the nation. Some individuals may be eligible for financial assistance through them for adaptive equipment in cars. The following is contact information for four companies:

**Daimier Chrysler Corporation**  
Automobility Program  
P.O. Box 3124  
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302  
800-255-9877

**Ford Motor Company**  
Ford Mobility Motoring  
P.O. Box 529  
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303  
800-952-2248  
TTY 800-833-0312

**General Motors Corporation**  
GM Mobility Assistance Center  
P.O. Box 9011  
Detroit, MI 48202  
800-323-9935

**Saturn**  
Saturn Mobility Program  
100 Saturn Parkway  
Spring Hill, TN 37174  
800-553-6000 Prompt 3

## Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative

Polk Library  
800 Algoma Blvd.  
Oshkosh, WI 54901

Phone: 920-424-2247  
Fax: 920-424-1396  
Email: [elahm@cesa6.k12.wi.us](mailto:elahm@cesa6.k12.wi.us)



The Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative ensures that every child in Wisconsin who may need assistive technology (AT) has equal and timely access to appropriate assessment and the provision and implementation of needed AT devices and services.

The goal is to improve the outcomes and results for children with disabilities, birth to 21, through the use of assistive technology to access services, curriculum, and school and community activities. The project increases the capacity of early intervention agencies, school districts, and their partners to provide assistive technology by making training and technical assistance available throughout Wisconsin.



## Other Resources



### Free Gas Cap Wrench

The Wisconsin Partners for Clean Air is providing a free gas cap wrench to assist with opening and closing the gas cap. This is great for people who had limited strength or flexibility in their hands. For more information and to register, go to:

[www.cleanairwisconsin.org/](http://www.cleanairwisconsin.org/)

**Disabilities and Their Implications for Driver Assessment and Training** - Louisiana Tech University. This document provides a basic source of information for consumers, driver rehabilitation specialists, driver educators, physicians, driver license examiners and others with an interest in personal transportation for individuals with disabilities. It covers: congenital, developmental, acquired, and progressive disabilities. For more information call 318/257-4562

**Driver's Education for Students with Physical Disabilities** by Tama McGill & Laura K. Vogtle in the *Exceptional Children* (67 no. 4, 455-66, Summer 2001). This article

covers the perceptions of students with physical disabilities regarding the process of learning to drive.

**Driving Force...Toward Independence** by Iris Drower in the *Exceptional Parent* (28 no 7, 54-6, July 1998). This article shows a parent where to look for help in determining if their child is ready to learn how to drive.

**Yankton School Dist. v. Schramm, 93 F.3d 1369,1374 (8th Cir. 1996).** This is a court case which noted that specially designed instruction in driver's education, self-advocacy, and independent living skills such as cooking and cleaning were appropriate transition services for a student with an orthopedic impair-

ment who wanted to attend college. Website: [http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/caselaw/case\\_yankton\\_IDEA\\_504\\_8thCir.html](http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/caselaw/case_yankton_IDEA_504_8thCir.html)

**Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED)** - This organization was established in 1977 to support **professionals** working in the field of driver education / driver training and transportation equipment modifications for persons with disabilities through education and information dissemination. Website: [www.driver-ed.org](http://www.driver-ed.org)

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