

Centre de santé et de services sociaux
Cavendish
Health and Social Services Centre
Affilié universitaire



SAFETY TIPS

For volunteers
accompanying people
with a mobility impairment

Safety Tips

For volunteers accompanying people
with a mobility impairment

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- The masculine pronoun is used for ease of reading
- This guide can be downloaded at www.creges.ca
- This guide is also available in French

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A word from the coordinator

Volunteers are indispensable to the mission of the CSSS. Your contributions enable us to broaden the range of services offered by our professionals. You enhance the quality of our services. You bring warmth and purpose to a client's life. You positively impact the life of a client, particularly seniors who live in isolation. With your presence, you help seniors to get a new lease on life by becoming motivated again to interact with people, go outside, get some exercise and reconnect with society.

Thank you!

Anna Maria Malorni,
Coordinator of Volunteer Services
CSSS Cavendish-CAU

Section 1.

Introduction

1.1 A tool for the volunteers

For whom is this handbook created?

This handbook is for volunteers who offer accompaniment to people experiencing a loss of mobility. It is recommended that this guide is distributed to volunteers to accompany practical training.

What is the purpose of this handbook?

As a volunteer, this handbook is designed to provide you with practical information required to ensure the safety of the client as well as your own safety, such as:

- Safety principles to be respected when accompanying a client.
- Basic tips to provide the client to facilitate his mobility.
- Reminders of your role and responsibilities as a volunteer.

1.2 Reminder of the volunteer's role

Your role is to provide moral support, assistance and companionship to the client. You are not there to assist the client physically.

Five Basic Safety Principles

1. Think about your own security too. Only accept responsibilities you are comfortable with and capable of handling safely.
2. You are **not authorized** to transfer, lift or physically handle the client, at any time.
3. Guide the client by providing verbal advice, **not** physical assistance.
4. Remind the client that you are not allowed to accompany him if his walking aid is not used as prescribed.
5. Report all important events or problems to your assigned supervisor (such as changes in client's capacities or hazards at the home).

1.3 What to do in case of a fall

If a client falls, never try to lift him. It can be very dangerous for him and for you.

If a client falls

1. Call **911**.
2. Cover the client with a blanket or a jacket.
3. Talk to the client while you wait for the ambulance.
4. Do not leave the client alone.

Section 2. Accompanying a person who does not use a walking aid

2.1 Walking

What to check for

- The client is walking at a steady pace:
 - He can easily talk while walking
- Signs of fatigue:
 - Breathlessness
 - Decrease in walking pace
- Proper footwear:
 - Proper support for the heels and ankles
 - Non-slippery soles
 - Well-adjusted to feet



How to help

- If the client is stable, you can guide him by providing your elbow to hold onto.

Warning:

- If the client looks unstable on his feet, do not allow him to lean on you. Stop walking.

Tip: Plan on taking breaks during the walk.

2.2 Sitting down on a chair

What to check for

- Suggest to the client that he chooses a chair with:
 - Armrests
 - A firm seat
 - Good back support
 - A seat at the same height as his knees



Guide the client verbally to sit down

- Back up until the back of your legs touch the chair.
- Hold onto the armrests or onto the seat of the chair, with both arms.
- Sit down slowly on the chair and slide to the back of the seat.



Where to position yourself

- Stand on one side of the chair.

2.3 Standing up from a chair

Guide the client verbally to stand up

- Slide to the edge of the chair.
- Align your toes with your knees.
- Lean your trunk forward as you push onto the armrests (or push your arms on your knees), to lift your buttocks from the chair.
- Stand up!



Where to position yourself

- Stand on one side of the chair, but slightly in front facing the client.

Tip: Advise the supervisor if the client has difficulty getting up from the sofa, toilet or chair.

2.4 Going up the stairs

Guide the client verbally to go up the stairs

- Grip onto the railing with one or two hands.
- Lift up your stronger leg first onto the next step.
- Next, bring up your weaker leg to the same step, still holding on to the railing.

Where to position yourself

- Stand behind the client when he is going up the stairs.



Tip: Locate an elevator or an easier path when in a public building.

2.5 Going down the stairs

Guide the client verbally to go down the stairs

- Grip onto the railing with one or two hands.
- Bring down your weaker leg first onto the lower step.
- Next, bring down your stronger leg to the same step still holding on to the railing.

Where to position yourself

- Stand in front of the client when he is going down the stairs.



Warning:

- Do not hold on to the client.

Tip: Inform the supervisor if the client has difficulty going up and/or down the stairs.

Section 3.

Accompanying a person who uses a cane

3.1 Walking with a cane

How to use the cane

- Usually, the client should hold the cane on the side of his strongest leg.
- The cane should be at a proper height, that is:
 - When the client is standing straight with his arms against his body and with his legs slightly spread apart, the top of the cane should be at wrist level.



Guide the client verbally

- First, bring the cane and the opposite leg forward at the same time.
- Next, bring the other leg forward.

Where to position yourself

- Stand on the weaker side of the client.

3.2 Sitting down with a cane

Guide the client verbally to sit down

- Preferably, use a chair with armrests.
- Back up until the back of your legs touch the chair.
- Make sure the cane is nearby or give it to the volunteer while you sit down.
- Grab onto the armrests of the chair and sit down slowly.

Where to position yourself

- Position yourself on the weaker side of the client when he sits down.

Warning:

- Do not adjust the cane on your own! If you think that it is not at the appropriate height, report it to the supervisor.

Tips: If the tip of the cane is worn out, suggest that the client replace it.

3.3 Standing up with a cane

Guide the client verbally to stand up

- Slide forward to sit on the edge of the chair.
- Grab both armrests of the chair.
- Keep one leg in back and lean forward.
- Lift yourself out of the chair by pushing your weight off of the armrests.
- Once you are standing, take your cane.

Where to position yourself

- Stand on the weaker side of the client but slightly in front when he gets up.

Warning:

- Make sure the client does not lean on the cane when sitting down or getting up from the chair.

3.4 Going up the stairs with a cane

Guide the client verbally to go up the stairs

- Hold on to the railing with your hand.
- Step up with your stronger leg first but keep the cane on the first step.
- Push on the stronger leg in order to bring the weaker leg and the cane up to the next step.



Where to position yourself

- Stand behind the client when he is going up the stairs.

Warning:

- Make sure the client stops on each step with both legs before continuing to the next.

Tip: If the railing is on the same side as the cane, the client can switch the cane to the other side.

3.5 Going down the stairs with a cane

Guide the client verbally to go down the stairs

- Hold on to the railing.
- First, step down with the cane and the weaker leg to the lower step.
- Next, step down to the same step with the stronger leg.



Where to position yourself

- Stand in front of the client when he is going down the stairs.

Tip: Remember how to use the stairs with a cane: “Up with the good leg first, down with the bad leg first”

Section 4.

Accompanying a person who uses a walker

4.1 Walking

How to use a walker

- The client should always hold the walker with both hands.
- The walker has to be at the appropriate height:
 - When the client is standing upright with his arms against his body and his legs slightly spread apart, the walker should be at wrist level.



Warning:

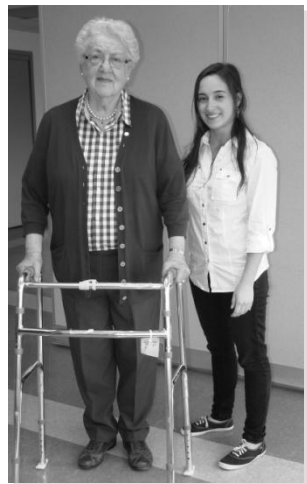
- If the walker does not seem to be at the proper height, do not adjust it on your own! Advise the supervisor. A different height might be needed due to certain health issues.

- Open the walker completely. Check that it is well locked in the middle of the front bar.
- To close the walker, push the button in the middle of the front bar.



Guide the client verbally to walk

- If the walker has wheels or sky glides, push it forward one arm's length.
- If it doesn't have wheels, lift the walker at each step.
 - Move the walker forward.
 - Once all four legs of the walker are on the ground, take a step.



Where to position yourself

- You should stand a step behind the client.

Warning:

- If the walker does not have wheels, four tips need to be on the ground before the client puts his weight on it.

4.2 Passing over a doorstep

Give verbal instructions

- Advance the walker as close as possible towards the doorstep.



- Pass the front tips (or wheels) of the walker over the doorstep.
- Take a step forward.
- Pass the back tips (or wheels) of the walker over the doorstep.
- Pass one leg over the doorstep and then the other leg.



Tip: Remind the client to look forward (rather than at his feet) when walking.

4.3 Sitting down with a walker

Guide the client verbally to sit down

- Back up until the back of your legs touch the chair.
- Lean forward to grab the armrests of the chair with one hand and then the other. If there are no armrests, hold on to your thighs or the seat.
- Slowly sit down and then slide all the way back on the chair.

Where to position yourself

- Position yourself on the side of the client but slightly in front when he sits down.



4.4 Standing up with a walker

Guide the client verbally to stand up

- Slide forward in the chair until your feet are firmly on the floor.
- Grab onto the armrests of the chair.
- Lean slightly forward and raise yourself slowly off the chair.
- Hold the crossbar of the walker with one hand, and then grab both handles of the walker.
- Before starting to walk, make sure you feel steady and are ready to move forward.



Where to position yourself

- Position yourself on the side of the client but slightly in front when he gets up.

Warning:

- The client should never hold on to the handle of the walker when he sits down or gets up.

4.5 Going up and down the stairs

Warning:

- The use of a walker on the stairs is dangerous.
- Use a ramp or an elevator.

Section 5.

Accompanying a person who uses a wheelchair

5.1 Manoeuvring a wheelchair

How to use the wheelchair

- To fold the wheelchair, remove the cushion and pull up the middle of the seat.



- To unfold the wheelchair, move the armrests apart and push down on both sides of the seat.



- When the client is being pushed in their wheelchair, their feet should be placed on the footrests.



Tip: When the client is getting into or out of the wheelchair make sure that the brakes are on and that the footrests are pushed to the sides.



How to ensure your own safety

- Be aware of your capabilities. If you have a medical condition, like back or neck problems, do not manoeuvre the wheelchair.
- You cannot push a wheelchair if the client is obese.

- When manoeuvring the wheelchair, do not strain or force with your back. Instead, use the strength of your legs.
- Make sure that you are wearing closed shoes, with non-slippery soles and proper support.

Warning:

- Never hang purses or other material on the back of the wheelchair because this can make it more prone to tip over backwards.
- If there is no automatic door, ask for someone to help you open the door.

5.2 Passing over a doorstep

- Get as close as you can to the doorstep.
- Tilt the wheelchair slightly and push it until the smaller front wheels are over the doorstep.
- Put the wheelchair back down.
- Advance until the back wheels touch the doorstep and then push the wheelchair forward.

Tip: Always inform the client of what you are about to do.

5.3 Using an elevator

- When entering an elevator, back the wheelchair into the elevator so that the client is facing front.
- When exiting the elevator, first ask the other people to step out and keep the doors open. If possible, turn the wheelchair around and back it out. Otherwise, move forward using the technique for passing over a doorstep.

Warning:

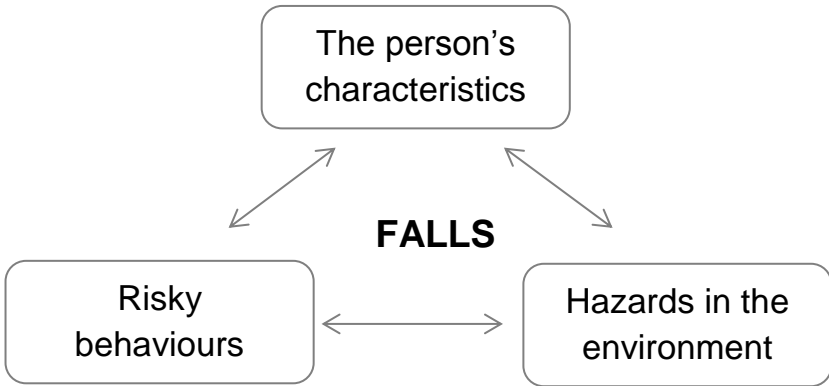
- Do not move the wheelchair around when the elevator is in motion.
- Do not use wheelchairs on escalators.



Section 6. Helping to prevent falls

Risk factors for falls

Many falls among seniors occur in their homes. Here are the main risk factors for falls.



The person's characteristics

These are the main risk factors related to the person's condition:

- Medical condition (e.g. dizziness, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, dementia).
- Mobility problems (e.g. poor balance, poor strength, poor posture, slower reflexes).
- Visual problems.
- Anxiety or fear of falling.

Risky behaviours

There are many risk factors related to a person's behaviour. Here are some tips to help prevent falls.

- Remind the client of the dangers of climbing, rushing, etc.
- Encourage the client to wear proper shoes and to use his or her cane or walker.
- Make sure the client wears his or her glasses.
- Remind the client to maintain a balanced diet and not to skip any meals.
- “Stop talking while walking”
Ask the client to concentrate when moving and allow him or her to position himself before starting a conversation. As we get older, we need to focus more to maintain balance.

Hazards in the environment

These are the main risk factors related to a person's environment. Here are some tips.

- Remind the client of the importance of proper lighting in each room of the home.
- Suggest that the client clears away obstacles that are in the way (e.g.: loose carpet, rugs, and electrical wires from lamps).
- Help the client to place frequently used items on lower shelves (e.g.: plates in the kitchen).
- Remind the client to use a non-skid bath mat in the washroom.
- Advise your supervisor if you notice there is no handrail on the staircase.

How to help prevent falls

You are strongly encouraged to report to the supervisor your observations regarding the safety of the client's home environment and changes that you think should be made to reduce the risk of falls.

Safety Tips

For volunteers accompanying people with a mobility impairment

As a volunteer, this handbook will help you keep in mind the importance of SAFETY when accompanying a client.

Your role is to provide moral support, assistance and companionship to the client.

It is important for this to be done in a safe way.

You make a big difference in a client's life, and with the knowledge and tips provided in the handbook, you will make volunteering a positive experience for yourself and your client.

The *Centre de santé et de services sociaux Cavendish* is an affiliated university centre. Researchers and practitioners unite with partners in clinical and community settings to develop innovative practices in the field of social gerontology.

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