



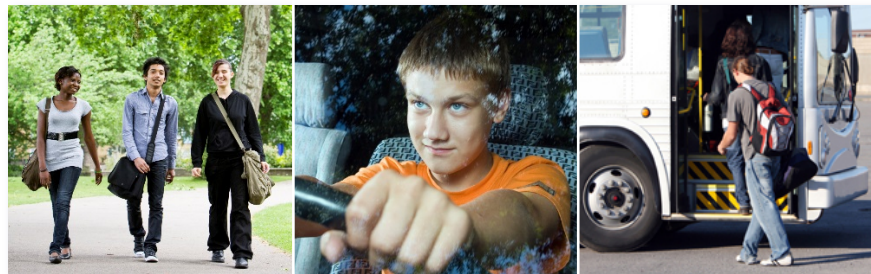
Creating Successful Transitions From School to Community

Occupational therapy: addressing the needs of
students with cognitive and social challenges in
community mobility



Introduction

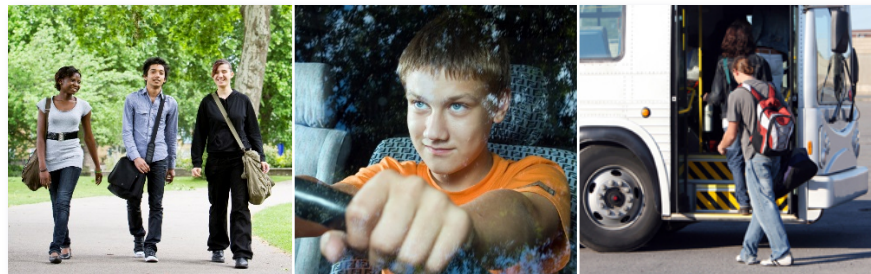
- Transitioning from high school to independent living can be extremely challenging for students with limited cognitive and social skills.
- The school environment provides structure and professional support that will be unavailable once a student graduates.
- The individualized education plan (IEP) is an opportunity for team members to create a plan to develop a student's **skills for independent living** after graduation from high school.



Introduction

Independent living skills encompass

- Self-care,
- Home management,
- Vocational skills,
- Leisure,
- Financial management, and
- **Community mobility.**



Occupational Therapy

- Occupational therapy addresses the **occupational performance** of people in all of their roles.
- Occupational therapy professionals can **assess why** a person has difficulty with a specific life task.
- Is a cognitive, motor, sensory, social, or a visual skill the limiting factor?



Occupational Therapy

(cont.)

The role of occupational therapy is to

- Rehabilitate,
- Provide strategies, or
- Adapt a task

to enable the person to achieve the maximum level of independence in a specific task or life skill.



Introduction

- The school-based occupational therapist is a team member in developing a student's life skills.
- The school team addresses prevocational, self-care, home making, and financial management
- **Community mobility**, however, is a frequently overlooked life skill.

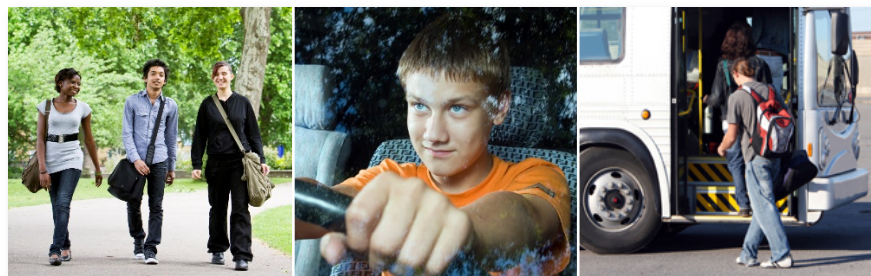
Competent community mobility skills are essential to accessing the goods, services, and opportunities that maximize independence in all life skills.



Community Mobility

Community mobility includes

- Driving,
- Mass transit: bus/subway/train,
- Taxi,
- Family,
- Ride sharing,
- Biking, and
- Walking.



Community Mobility (cont.)

Community mobility is essential for accessing

- Vocational opportunities,
- Recreational opportunities,
- Goods and services (e.g., food, banks, drug stores),
- Postsecondary education
- Medical services, and
- Social opportunities.

Without sufficient community mobility skills, students are unlikely to reach their full potential.



Community Mobility (cont.)

Community Mobility Options

The appropriate choice of community mobility depends on:

- The student's cognitive and social skills
- Residential environment (city vs. rural); and
- Climate (ice and snow vs. sunny weather)



Community Mobility (cont.)

Life skills, including community mobility, are achieved through the successful use of the following underlying **cognitive and social skills**:

- Planning
- Organization
- Attention
- Problem solving
- Judgment
- Social interaction.

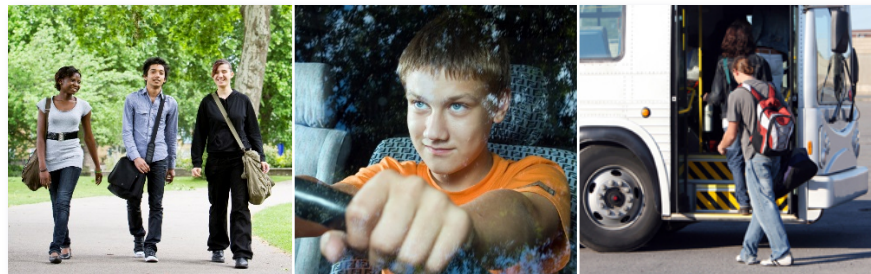


Who Has Community Mobility Challenges?

Students with

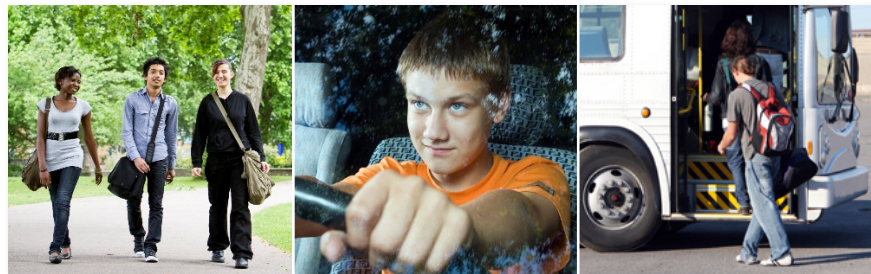
- Learning impairments,
- Autism spectrum disorder,
- Nonverbal learning disability,
- ADD or ADHD, or
- Brain injury

have cognitive and social skill limitations that can be the barrier for achieving life skills at large as well as community mobility.



Community Mobility and the Transitional IEP

- When we address life skills, it is important that we do not overlook community mobility. Community mobility is intertwined with a student's goals for employment, leisure, postsecondary education, and residential setting.
- Community mobility skills have a critical role in achieving and determining all other life skills and is part of the transitional IEP.



Community Mobility and the Transitional IEP *(cont.)*

The transitional IEP includes

- Employment
- Postsecondary education or training
- Independent living
- **Community participation
(including transportation and leisure)**

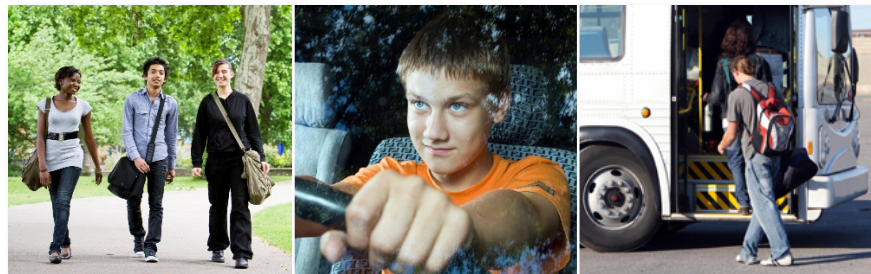
The areas addressed in the transitional IEP are central to the practice of occupational therapy



Community Mobility and the Transitional IEP *(cont.)*

Community mobility in the transitional IEP comes under the general category of **community participation** and can include the following elements:

- Pedestrian safety
- Navigational skills and route planning
- Use of public transportation
- Scheduling and time management
- Driver education support
- Driver rehab evaluation and training.

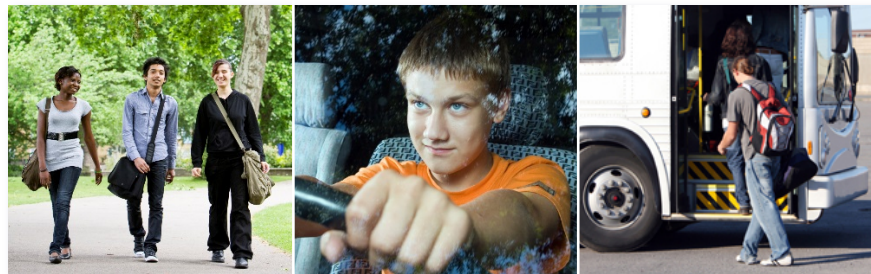


Community Mobility and the Transitional IEP *(cont.)*

All transitional goals should include

- The underlying cognitive and social ability being addressed, and
- The adaptations being used, if any,

within the context of the independent living skill.



Role of Occupational Therapy in the Transitional IEP

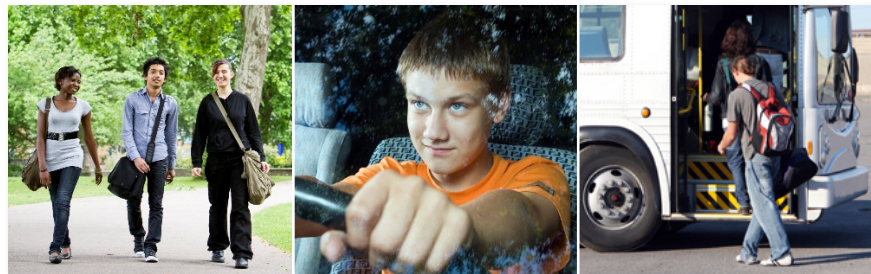
- Using the knowledge of specific conditions, an occupational therapist can **assess and treat** the underlying skills within the context of the life skills programming.
- Occupational therapists contribute to the **transitional IEPs for establishing appropriate goals.**



Learning Impairments

Cognitive skills:

- Delayed cognitive and visual processing speed and difficulties with problem solving and multitasking typically prevent such students from being candidates for driving.
- Challenges with planning, problem solving, and recognizing hazards can put students at risk for pedestrian safety and safety when using mass transit. However, skills may be achievable with the correct supports, strategies, and adaptations.
- If gaining independence with a task is not a realistic goal, then the goal can be partial independence with part of a task.



Learning Impairments (cont.)

Motor skills:

- Delayed motor development and coordination may make learning to ride a bike difficult.

Social skills:

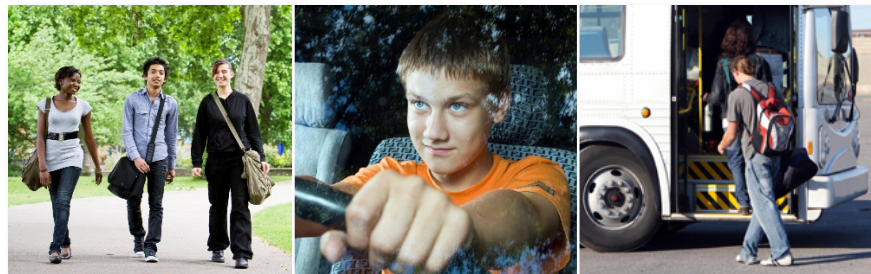
- Difficulty interpreting the nonverbal communication of others may make students more susceptible to scam artists.



Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism

Cognitive skills:

- Difficulty prioritizing information; all information is equal when looking at the driving environment.
- Difficulty anticipating hazards, such as other drivers opening car doors on city streets or safely opening one's own car door when parked on a street.
- Difficulty with problem solving (e.g., what to do if the bus does not show up).
- Difficulty keeping track of time to get to the bus stop or meet the taxi on time.
- Difficulty discerning hazards when crossing streets and walking in congested parking lots.



Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism (cont.)

Motor deficits:

- Learning to coordinate gas, brakes, and steering is a challenge, especially in the context of hills, curves, and right and left turns.
- Learning to maintain balance and motor coordination for riding a bike may also be difficult.

Social skills:

- People with Asperger syndrome have difficulty discerning others' unsafe behavior, which may put them at greater risk when taking public transportation.



Nonverbal Learning Disability

Cognitive skills:

- Difficulty with awareness of time passing, leading to missing buses and ride shares
- Difficulty with visual-spatial skills, creating challenges in interpreting maps for bus schedules as well as for driving and pedestrian travel
- Difficulty prioritizing information, creating difficulty making an appropriate action plan as a driver
- Difficulty problem solving novel situations in the community
- Difficulty identifying hazards, putting students at risk when crossing a street



Nonverbal Learning Disability *(cont.)*

Motor skills:

- Coordination deficits for driving (e.g., regulating pressure on the pedals and steering)
- Difficulty with motor coordination for riding a bike

Social skills:

- Difficulty interpreting when others are taking advantage of them
- Difficulty interpreting actions of other drivers, whether they are a driver, pedestrian, or cyclist



ADHD/ADD

Cognitive skills:

- Difficulty with directing their attention to critical information puts them at risk for crashes when driving, cycling, or walking.
- Tendency to make quick decisions puts them at risk for crossing a street as a pedestrian or entering traffic prematurely as a driver.
- Difficulty with attention to detail affects planning the schedule, costs, and route for mass transit.



ADHD/ADD *(cont.)*

Cognitive skills:

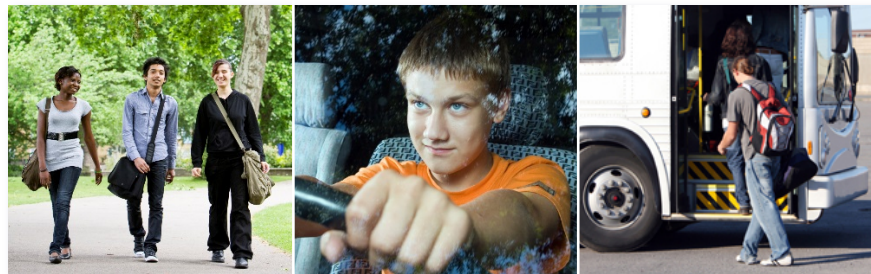
- Difficulty with self-awareness of the impact of medication on their performance puts them at risk for driving and cycling crashes as well as pedestrian injuries
- Difficulty with attention to details means that they have a tendency to lose bus tickets, cash, and keys.



Brain Injury

Cognitive skills:

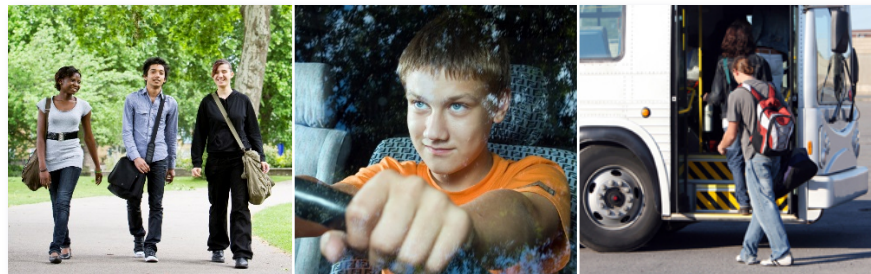
- Difficulty with insight and judgment regarding their abilities may cause them to make unsafe decisions as drivers and cyclists.
- Difficulty with impulsivity or the pace at which they make decisions may cause them to enter traffic prematurely whether they are a cyclist or pedestrian.
- Difficulty with multitasking may put them at higher risk for crashes while driving or cycling at intersections and during complicated maneuvers, such as lane changes.



Brain Injury *(cont.)*

Cognitive skills *(cont.)*:

- Difficulty with planning, organization, and problem solving may make it difficult to manage mass transit, including route planning, scheduling, financial planning, and time management.
- Difficulty with concentration can affect driving, cycling, and pedestrian safety.



Brain Injury *(cont.)*

Motor skills:

- Difficulty with strength or sensation may make it necessary to have driving adaptations.

Visual skills:

- Difficulty with visual search skills and speed of visual processing can affect driving and cycling safety.

Social skills:

- Difficulty with judgment can lead to unsafe behavior with substance abuse.



Community Mobility and Other Independent Living Skills

The following cognitive and social skills are used in community mobility:

- Attention
- Interacting with familiar people and strangers
- Interpreting actions of others
- Judgment
- Managing medications
- Managing time and finances
- Multitasking
- Organizing
- Planning
- Problem solving

They are also used in all other independent living skills.



Community Mobility and Other Independent Living Skills *(cont.)*

- Employment
- Postsecondary education or training
- Independent living
- Community participation
(including transportation and leisure)

Being successful in any of these areas requires community mobility.



Resources

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