

Caregivers Connection

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Contact: Rita Burfeind

262 377-7869

rbuf@wi.rr.com

Trains, Planes, and Automobiles

Travel—whether to visit beloved family or friends or to sightsee in the United States or elsewhere—is a pleasurable experience that enhances one’s life. Physical and mental disabilities may cause people to think twice before embarking on any kind of long trip. Caregivers and the loved one with the disability must consider the difficulties and benefits of the journey.

Before giving up on the idea of taking a thousand-mile trip to attend a grandson’s wedding, however, check on the helps that might be available for such an excursion. The Americans with Disabilities Act assures that public means of transportation must be accessible to those with special needs.

Airlines and Amtrak provide services to those travelers who need wheel chairs, to those who are vision or hearing impaired, and to those who require oxygen. For airline helps, especially with screening, contact TSA Cares at 1-855-787-2227. For information about supports on Amtrak, call 1-800-872-7245.

By typing “traveling with person with disabilities” or “traveling with persons with dementia,” computer search engines can find informational websites. Another good resource is other individuals who have made a similar trip.

Eventually, there comes a time when travel is no longer an option for the person with a disability. With dementia, taking a long trip is not advisable if the loved one exhibits the following signs: consistent disorientation, confusion, or agitation; problems managing continence; uninhibited actions; wandering behavior; physical or verbal aggression; high risk of falling; unstable medical conditions. The latter two points would apply in the case of a physical disability as well.

General tips when traveling with someone with a disability—physical or mental are:

- Consider the options (plane, train, or car). Go with the one that creates the least anxiety for the individual. Avoid connecting flights or train transfers. Be aware that busy terminals can be very confusing and can cause agitation.
- Make reservations early. Describe the situation clearly and specifically when requesting special services. Even if someone doesn't usually use a wheel chair, it might be advantageous to request one at the airport.
- Prepare a packet of important documents and information that include—
 - ✓ identification
 - ✓ emergency contact information
 - ✓ doctors' names and contact information—include letter from doctor about special needs and other pertinent information
 - ✓ list of medications and dosages including drug allergies
 - ✓ copies of legal papers (living will, advanced directives, power of attorney)
 - ✓ travel itinerary
- Carry medical alert information in a place that is easily accessible: wallet, card, necklace, or bracelet. Include name, phone numbers, and medical conditions, including Alzheimer's or dementia. Consider marking clothing with the name of the individual. Carry a recent picture of the loved one, in case he/she wanders off and becomes lost.
- Be prepared with a pack containing water, snacks, activities, incontinence products, and a change of clothing.
- Look for signs of distress in your loved one and try to calm and reassure him/her.
- Make sure the person is wearing comfortable clothing, especially for ease in using the rest room.
- Arrive early enough at airport or train station to allow enough time for check in, etc.

If making an automobile trip, plan enough time to schedule rest stops—perhaps several. Do not leave the person with dementia unsupervised in unfamiliar surroundings. Travel during the person’s best time of day.

Caregivers should assess whether they are capable of making a long trip with someone who has disabilities. Caregivers will need to be able to manage unexpected events and perhaps challenging behaviors. They may face stressful situations and lack of sleep. They need to be realistic, show patience and resiliency, and keep a sense of humor.

In Ozaukee County, Caregiver Coffees—sponsored by the Caregivers Coalition of Ozaukee County—meet three different times each month. At these meetings, those who attend share information (such as helpful hints related to travel) and support for one another. In November, the groups will meet on **November 4, 2014 (first Tuesday of each month) 6:00-7:30 p.m.**, at The Providence Place, 815 Washington Avenue (Hwy. 60), Grafton; **November 11, 2014 (second Tuesday of each month) 10-11:30 a.m.**, the County Administration Building, room #117, 121 W. Main St., Port Washington. Contact Julie Irvine at 414 333-1168 or jirvine@marykay.com for information; and **November 26, 2014 (fourth Wednesday of each month), 10:00-11:30 a.m.** at Lakefield Adult Day Center.

Lakefield Adult Day Center provides care for loved ones while the caregivers attend the coffee there. For more information about any of the Caregiver Coffees, contact Barbara Lindholm at (262) 376-4328 or blindywb2@sbcglobal.net or Julie Irvine.

Submitted by Rita Burfeind

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