

## Choosing a Transportation Provider for Your Loved One

When your parent or loved one can no longer safely drive themselves, or when it becomes impractical to rely on family members or other conventional public transportation options, you need to evaluate the service of a professional assisted transportation specialist. Finding a company who is reliable, kind, and pleasant can help your parent with an adjustment that very few people like to make. But having a careful driver who can transport her safely will help protect your parent's life and well being, as well as the lives of others.

### Determine the Level of Service and Degree of Assistance Required

Take the following factors into account: This is by no means a complete list, so be aware of any and all details of the service you require for your parent. Take the time to address any concerns you may have.

- Do they require "curb to curb", "door to door" or "through the door" service?
- Is your parent confined to a wheelchair, or can they walk with assistance of the driver, or cane?
- Are they limited in their ability to communicate, and are they aware of their surroundings?
- Are there stairs, inclines, narrow passages or unpaved surfaces to cross?
- Are there any special physical limitations or weight considerations?
- How often will they require transport? Will service such as medical appointments be requested on a regular schedule?
- Will the driver be requested to wait for your parent during their appointment or errand, or will the driver drop off and return at a later time?
- Will a caregiver or family member accompany your parent or loved one?
- Will you be paying for the service by private pay ie. cash credit card, Health Insurance, Medicaid or Medi-Cal?

### Choosing the Best Possible Transportation Provider

Once you've assessed your parent's or loved one's transportation needs and identified assisted transportation providers, you will then have to select the one offers the best fit. Here are some questions you will want to have answered during initial contact with the transportation provider:

- Start by asking for general background information. Find out how long the provider has been in the transportation business. Allow the company representative to do much of the talking so you can get an idea of his personality and communication skills and make sure the driver's style is compatible with your parent.
- Ask for at least three references, with contact information for each, and then call them. Be diligent about checking these references, since this is a stranger your parent will be spending a lot of time with, and entrusting her safety to.
- Ask if they are permitted with the appropriate agencies to conduct business in your city and county. The San Diego Metropolitan Transit District regulates the non-emergency medical transportation industry for San Diego County. A company credentialed by MTD assures you that they have adequate training, safe and reliable vehicles, a proper insurance policy in effect, and pre-screened qualified drivers.
- Ask hypothetical questions about driving choices and make sure you and your parent feel comfortable with the responses.
- When you think you've found the right company for the job, be upfront about what you expect of them. It is important to know ahead of time what tasks he dislikes doing or will do at an extra cost -- such as transporting a wheelchair client up any steps or over unpaved surfaces. unloading the groceries etc.
- If your parent will be riding in the transportation provider's care, you'll want to make sure the vehicle is a safe one.
- Ask why he wants this job, his previous experience, and why he thinks he is right for the position.
- If you do hire the company, set up a trial period of two to three weeks so you have time to evaluate his work over time and make sure he has a compatible relationship with your parent. Make an appointment to discuss the arrangement after a few driving sessions, and then again every few months, so you can give each other feedback. Your goal is a relationship that meets both your parent's needs and those of the transportation provider.

### **Establish a Clear Process for Communication.**

Do you prefer to communicate in person, by phone, by internet? Or a mix of methods? What are your transportation provider's preferences for how to be contacted? These are all questions and answers you should bring up at the outset of your relationship rather than on an as-needed basis. Emergency protocol and a backup plan (and a backup to the backup plan) are crucial elements of any good relationship between provider and employer.

### **Set Expectations**

Establish a plan and schedule for exchanging information.

- Discuss cancellations and last-minute changes in advance.
- Make sure you and the care provider are clear about these expectations.
- Terms of payment: the amount as well as the method for paying (each week, each month, cash or check, insurance etc.).
- Hours the transportation provider will work. If these hours will vary from week to week, or from day to day, say so.
- Provisions for sick or vacation days.
- How much notice either party requests for rescheduling.
- Terms for ending the contract.

### **Arrange an unexpected "ride-along"**

Interviewing a provider is one thing, but actually observing the way the provider and your parent interact when they aren't expecting you can give you crucial information about how the situation is evolving.

### **Conclusion**

Now, you need to make sure that all parties involved -- you, your parent and your transportation provider -- are happy with the arrangement, that it's a reliable one, and that you're getting the quality of service you expect. By setting up a clear plan for managing and evaluating your service needs at the outset of the relationship, you'll get the best outcome and positive experience -- even if you have to make adjustments along the way.

Once you have agreed on the terms of the contract, discuss how frequently you will check in on how you are each feeling about the job. Regular communication will help ensure that you are both satisfied with your arrangement.