

Driving and Cerebral Palsy

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Cerebral Palsy (CP) applies to a number of non-progressive motor disorders present from birth. The involvement varies widely from person to person. The person with CP may or may not be a wheelchair user. Frequently special vehicle adaptations are necessary for independent driving. The person with CP may also have impairments in the areas of vision, perception (how the brain interprets what the eyes see), or learning.

Adaptive equipment is frequently used for physical problems. A spinner knob can be attached to the steering wheel to allow controlled steering with the use of one hand. A left gas pedal may be used if a person is unable to use the right foot for gas or brake. Hand controls may be indicated for the person unable to use either foot for gas or brake. Specialized modifications can also allow a person to transfer to the driver seat or drive from the wheelchair in a van or minivan.

Common factors that can affect safe driving:

- Limited range of motion and strength
- Exaggerated startle reflex to loud noise
- Increased muscle tone
- Difficulty in coordinated movements
- Visual impairments
- Trouble scanning or tracking quickly
- Learning difficulties
- Impaired judgment in complex situations
- Slow processing and reaction time

A driver rehabilitation evaluation will examine the strengths and weaknesses of each individual as related to the driving task. The goal is independent, safe driving. No modifications or vehicle selection should be made until the person has completed a driver evaluation.

An assessment should include:

- Vision
- Cognition
- Perception
- Motor coordination
- Functional ability
- Reaction time
- Behind-the-wheel evaluation

If you or someone you know has Cerebral Palsy or is having difficulty, a driver evaluation may be indicated. A driver rehabilitation specialist can provide a comprehensive evaluation to determine one's ability to drive.

To locate a driver rehabilitation specialist in your area contact:

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