



Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

For help on driving capabilities please contact your state Department of Rehabilitation or your state Department of Motor Vehicles.

The site included below will help you find information about your state's DMV offices.

<http://www.autoweb.com/content/research/dmv/index.cfm/>

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Learning to Drive

By Linda Jorgensen

Last Fall I received an e-mail from the Mother of a 20-year-old young man who wished to obtain his driver's license. He had been given a basic evaluation showing capability but no other information on how to proceed after that. She had questions and quite frankly so did I.

Many special needs individuals will not have the skills needed to safely operate a motor vehicle but for those who may be capable there is a specific process to follow. Figuring out if your child is capable and how to find the evaluation and training programs available to identify those skills can be daunting. I was certainly not familiar with driver training and licensure requirements for special needs transition students in each state but did know they would vary. The only way to figure out what was needed was to just jump in and work the system.

Over the next week I managed to work my way through not one but four motor vehicle departments in four different states. Be aware this is a time consuming process, regardless of the state you are working with. As I originally thought, the process for obtaining a license for a special needs driver did vary by state. However, the basic requirements are pretty much the same.

Getting Started

Once your young adult has expressed a true interest in learning to drive it is important to evaluate their ability and readiness to do so. For some this is a task that will be beyond what they are capable of doing while others, if given time, will gain the maturity and capability required for this new set of skills. All of the program coordinators I spoke to recommended waiting until a special needs young adult is in their early twenties before beginning the driver's learning process. This age suggestion will vary by individual and condition as some individuals will be ready to try sooner than others.

Special equipment may also be needed for those requiring hand controls or vehicle adaptations. If this is the case students will be required to enroll in a specialized course designed to train students with that particular equipment. Most often training for this type of equipment will be provided by a State sponsored Rehabilitation program.

After you've determined your young adult truly wants to drive you'll need to contact your local Department of Motor Vehicles License Division for specific instructions. The process varies from that required of the average driver and each state has their own system for evaluation and training. It is important to follow department instructions in the order given and receive training by the recommended agency.

First Evaluation

Before a transitioning student begins a driver's education course they must first pass a pre-drive evaluation. This set of small tests is generally performed by a trained adapted services evaluator. This service could be performed through a state rehabilitation program, by a motor vehicle department designated adapted services examiner or a trained transition program coordinator. Students will be evaluated for physical ability, visual acuity and cognitive ability. Be prepared to answer a health questionnaire and provide an information release form. A physical examination with a Doctor's statement may also be required. Once the evaluation is complete submit these documents to the appropriate office. A medical review board will review the information and a set of recommendations will be made for the individual.

Some states will issue the individual a letter of driving instructions to be given to the road instructor which must be submitted BEFORE training can begin.

As with any program it is important to keep copies of all your documentation. These documents will pass through several offices and over many desks before a licensing decision can be made. Don't lose them or you'll find yourself back tracking or starting over.

Parents may find it helpful to locate a specific point of contact. One person in the Motor Vehicle Division Office that can be consistently contacted with questions, if need be.

Finding an Appropriate Training Course

Once your young adult has passed their first evaluation and received approval you'll need to follow the recommendations made by the medical review board. Many states will provide a list of approved programs while others will expect you to find one on your own. The state examiners I spoke to recommend a trained rehabilitation driving specialist through an approved state rehabilitation training program.

Driver Training

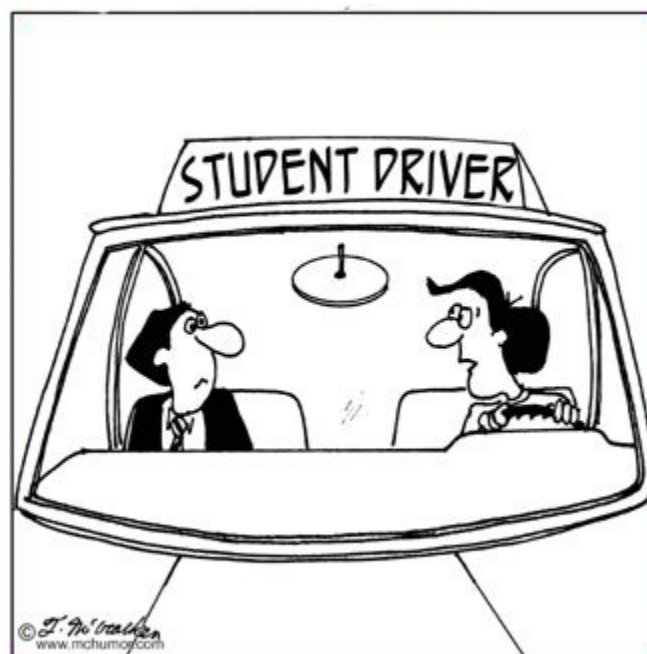
As with any other course students will be expected to spend time in the classroom learning the rules of the road, pass exams and receive road instruction from their certified instructor. These classes will be tailored to the student's needs as recommended by the Medical Evaluation Board. Once this section of

the training is complete students must pass a permit exam. Students must pass this exam in order to begin chaperoned driving with a parent or other, state approved, licensed driver at home. The number of chaperoned road hours required will vary by state and individual recommendations.

Once all driver training requirements have been met the student may apply for the final exam and road test.

New Driver

If all has gone well your young adult will have passed the exam and will have their own driver's license! Most states have very specific rules for new drivers and will often make other recommendations, such as limiting the number of miles driven, number of passengers allowed (if any), day time versus night time driving, etc. when warranted. By following the rules, exercising good judgment and some good luck of the road you'll have a new driver!



“But every time I leave a five car space in front of me, six cars cut in.”

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