

Educators' guide

Supporting People With Disabilities In Participating
Safely In Road Traffic In Order To Promote Their
Integration Into The Labour Market



Krimhild Kurzer (Translation: Kerstin Struckmeier)

CONTENT

1. Significance of mobility training for people with mental or learning disabilities with regard to every-day life and the professional environment	2
2. Preconditions for the participation in road traffic as pedestrians, car passengers, cyclists or users of the public transport system	3
3. Initial situation of people with disabilities	5
4. Pedagogical principles of road safety education	6
5. Road safety education supported by the use of videos	8

1. Significance of mobility training for people with mental or learning disabilities with regard to every-day life and the professional environment

An increase in the individual traffic safety leads to a higher degree of social integration for people with disabilities and entails the possibility of extending their personal experience and action radius. It furthers independence and the chance of looking after themselves.

To be entitled to decent work and the need for secure living conditions are human rights which have to be considered in this context. Besides the positive economic factor, people with disabilities develop a social identity and experience an appreciation of their achievement and their contribution to social life mostly by participating in the professional life.

An important precondition for leading a life as independent as possible is a safe participation in road traffic. Therefore, mobility trainings and continuous and sustainable education has a positive impact on all areas of life. In trainings and exercises competencies and skills like concentration and certain behavior are developed. These competencies are important in the traffic environment as well as at the work place and thus, the trainings further the employability of the participant, too. A higher degree of the individual safety in traffic gives each person the opportunity to create their independent personal life and their private retreat. For example, they can engage in partnerships or pursue all kinds of personal interests independently.

Being able to manage every-day life and to cope with the mobility it demands leads to a strengthened self-confidence and a trust in one's own capabilities.

The ability to manage every-day mobility issues on their own, to move about actively and independently and by that to organize their lives according to their own concept leads to a higher self-esteem and empowerment to cope with life. This strengthened ability may smooth the way for these persons to conquer other areas of life than just traffic.

- German citizens leave home, on average, three times a day and cover 30 km within 1 ¼ hour
- The organized German transport system for people with disabilities does not leave them any possibility to take part in traffic on their own

To enable people with disabilities to manage the participation in road traffic independently and as safely as needed, individual mobility trainings are of the utmost importance.

Another methodological approach aiming at enabling people with mental or learning disabilities to participate safely in road traffic is the production of videos in cooperation with the participants themselves, visualizing the topic ‘mobility’. By analyzing and discussing the pros and cons of mobility for each individual, by learning about the objectives and the structure of videos and the technical possibilities members of the target group enhance their traffic related knowledge and their competencies and skills. In addition, by addressing the topic ‘road safety’ and furthering mobility the motivation of people to get employed and earn their own living is most likely strengthened, too.

2. Preconditions for the participation in road traffic as pedestrians, car passengers, cyclists or users of the public transport system

For the person participating in road traffic it is of immense importance to be able to assess situations correctly. In critical situations they should be able to raise attention of others and get help. Besides developing competencies which enable members of the target group to participate safely in road traffic as pedestrians, car passengers or cyclists, learning how to react appropriately in situations in which vehicles are involved, especially in public transport, strengthens personal independence and autonomy of the participants.

Communication:

Road traffic is an agglomeration of unrelated subjects depicting a constant exchange of messages. A certain degree of safety can be reached only by automatically working processes and the use of seemingly archaic communication patterns. The reduced mimic of cars leads to an extremely impoverished communication. On the other hand, people with disabilities and, therefore, often limited communication abilities, are highly dependent on extensive communication. Part of the basic skills participants in road traffic need is the ability to translate intentions into signals which are at least remotely comprehensible. The ability to communicate as a participant in road traffic means that they are aware of the fact that the decoding of signals and the used channels of communication remain precarious. The task at hand is to agree upon only a few distinct signs and exercise the use of them.

The ability to communicate in road traffic includes the ability to send and decode nonverbal messages and the awareness of the fact that nonverbal messages are easily and often misunderstood. For participants it is important to have a variety of channels for non-verbal communication at their command.

(Source: Sonderpäd-online.de)

Basic social-emotional qualifications:

Feelings are states of agitation of the human being which cannot be created by willpower. People experience them as unique with regard to their intensity and manifestation. To handle and to control one's own feelings and those of others has to be learned.

Dealing with different states of emotion is of the utmost importance for correct behavior in road traffic, too.

Further basic social-emotional qualifications:

- Change of perspective
- Empathy
- Frustration tolerance (needs serenity and self-confidence)
- Detachment from roles

3. Initial situation of people with disabilities

Traffic education should aim at enabling people with mental or learning disabilities to participate in traffic as pedestrians (and further on as cyclists or even motor-cyclists). The organized collective transportation, which is currently the means of transport for most of them, keeps those persons from exercising and developing confidence in their own abilities while participating in traffic and thus, from coping well with overcoming distances.

Learning behavior

Generally, people with mental or learning disabilities learn at a lower speed. They struggle with a reduced memory capacity and cannot concentrate as long as people without those disabilities. They need special exercises and many repetitions. In addition, a reduction in the ability to react, a slower understanding of rules, a tendency to get more easily distracted and a strong tendency to copy others, a slower decisiveness and a not so strongly developed capability of transferring rules learned to new situations have to be taken into account.

Previously accumulated knowledge

as

- **pedestrians** (e.g. using crosswalks, communication with car drivers, not to rely on other pedestrians, different traffic light systems, appropriate behavior at points with restricted visibility)
- **car passengers** (obligatory wearing of seat belts)
- **users of public transportation** (behavior at bus stops or on platforms in train stations, behavior in the vehicle itself)

has to be addressed and tested.

The needed knowledge should be passed on to the persons with mental or learning disabilities according to their special needs and should be updated and tested regularly.

To ensure this quality of traffic education caretakers in care facilities or sheltered workshops have to be trained target-group-oriented in a continuous and sustainable manner. Additionally, it is important to involve in this training other persons occupied with caring tasks, especially the parents. They are role models and play an important role as guardians or „protectors“, and thus can encourage their children or proteges to go their own ways confidently.

Therefore, involving the parents in the mobility trainings is of vital importance. Parents and other care persons should be involved in the trainings as equal supporters and observers. In small groups traffic related situations can be discussed and possibilities to cope with challenges in road traffic can be identified.

4. Pedagogical principles of road safety education

All actions and educational measures have to focus on the special difficulties of participating in road traffic people with mental or learning disabilities are confronted with. Educators have to take into consideration the capability of the senses, the physical mobility and the cognitive capabilities of their target group.

- The starting point for the mobility training is the way the target group perceive and experience traffic – the perceptive abilities and the social- emotional competencies have to be taken into account. For example, people with mental or learning disabilities often misinterpret dangerous situations or wrong behavior of other traffic participants and miscalculate speed.
- At the same time the starting point of efficient mobility trainings are the individual qualifications and competencies of each participant. This leads to a personalized traffic education. The individual preconditions should be assessed by using checklists, standardized interviews and tests. The

individually developed mobility trainings should be based on the results of the evaluation of the assessment.

The rational approach as a pedagogical method comprises education by appealing to the rationality of each person that makes people act appropriately in certain traffic related situations. Teaching the correct behavior in certain situations is at the core of this method as opposed to studying individual traffic signs and rules. The strengthening of an activating caution (cautious behavior which allows actions) is the main goal. Not only establishing behavioral patterns but achieving a thorough understanding and allowing an extensive use of competencies in a way as flexible and as rational (adapted to the situation) as possible is the task at hand.

The systemic approach sees humans who participate in road traffic as systems which have to be integrated into another system (traffic). The latter itself comprises a large number of systems. Accidents are the result of a malfunctioning of the systems. The goal of road safety education is that participants learn about all systems and develop basic social competencies which enable them to join the system „road traffic“ and behave appropriately without causing disruptions.

The concept of moral motivation applied to road safety education aims at the development and awareness of values which represent the correct behavior as participants in road traffic. Mostly, accidents are not caused by failures of the cognitive system but by a deficiency of will or will power.

5. Road safety education supported by the use of videos

Basically, in road safety education contents have to be learned actively. Merely talking about certain phenomena is not sufficient. Learning actively by trying things out on their own is the most effective way of learning for people with mental or learning disabilities. This fact has to be taken into consideration when educators design educational concepts. It is of vital importance for the target group to get familiar with vehicles like bicycles, scooters, etc. as early in life as possible. They should be introduced to road traffic in a way that suits them best taking their individual competencies into account.

Further important methodological approaches:

- go from low-level education to higher levels of education; step by step learning, including a lot of repetitions, leads ultimately to success
- stress the fact that mobility is very useful for each person and enriches people's life
- give positive feedback regularly
- educators should verbalize their actions
- transfer of knowledge from familiar situations to different situations has to be trained
- acting and copying should cover a large part of the lessons
- persons with disabilities should act as educators themselves and train their peers
- correct and appropriate behavior should be rewarded, mistakes should be corrected immediately

Methodological suggestions for conducting a lesson

This exemplary lesson aims at enhancing the knowledge of people with mental or learning disabilities with regard to aspects of mobility. It is also aimed at sensitizing them to important aspects of road safety.

A video related to a special topic serves as a starting point and the basis for visualizing events and a profound discussion of possible problematic situations people might encounter in road traffic, led by the educator.

The didactical and methodological approach elaborated on in the following section is based mainly on the classical three-step approach:

1. Preparation (Introduction of the topic)
2. Look and see (with exercises or without; which traffic rules are already known?)
3. Review and discuss (secure knowledge and comprehension, form an opinion)

Basic knowledge is transmitted with regard to:

- the mobility of the participants
- the knowledge of road traffic rules
- the development of an awareness of possible dangers

Instructional media:

- as a starting point introducing the topic: a video (e.g. „Go to work safely by bicycle“ or „Go to work safely as a pedestrian“)
- topic-related worksheet
- topic-related quiz to assess previous knowledge and to acquire a deeper knowledge of the subject