

Safety and Emergency Procedures for Students with Disabilities

Whether accidents, natural disasters, or medical crises, emergencies occasionally occur, as do emergency preparedness drills. Instructors and staff should develop a plan of action if they are aware that one or more students in their classroom are D/deaf or hard of hearing, are blind or have low vision, or have a mobility disability. *Ultimately, persons with disabilities are responsible for their own safety in an emergency situation*, but classroom instructors always play an important role in student evacuation. For assistance in developing an evacuation plan, instructors may contact the Disability Resources/ Access Consultant. The following are some initial suggestions for accounting for disabilities when handling emergencies.

Students with Mobility Disabilities

In emergencies, instructors should assist individuals with mobility disabilities to ensure their safety:

- **During emergency evacuations:** During fires or other emergencies requiring evacuation, persons with mobility disabilities should be guided out of the building to a safe distance from the building whenever possible and expedient. For some emergencies, this is impossible due to blocked emergency egress, requiring such persons to "shelter in place" instead.
- **When sheltering in place:** In all cases of sheltering in place, noting the relative location of the nearest stairway or room number (e.g., SE or SW corner stairs 1st or 2nd floor) is vital, as it can facilitate efficient rescue from these areas. Instructors should inform sheltering students that rescue personnel will be notified of their exact position.
 - *During tornadoes*, a person with a mobility disability should be guided to an area of refuge in an internal room, away from windows.
 - *In cases of fire*, the student should be guided to a hall or a room, as close as possible to a stairway, protected by fire-rated doors and/or walls.
 - In most instances, attempting to carry a person with a disability is dangerous and ill-advised, as it can cause injury to both the carrier and the student.
 - While waiting in the area of refuge, the sheltering student should not block any stairway, as this can harm the student or others evacuating via the stairway.
 - Whenever possible, instructors should wait with students with mobility disabilities in areas of refuge. When this is not feasible, these students should be left with a cell phone to communicate with outside personnel.
 - Instructors should then alert emergency personnel of the location and need for evacuation of sheltering students.

Elevator Breakdowns and Repair

Elevator breakdowns and repair are a relatively common occurrence on campus and can be inconvenient or even life-threatening to a person who uses a wheelchair. When an elevator serving their classroom ceases to operate, instructors should contact Campus Resources Office, 651-361-3342, help@mcnallysmith.edu.

Finally, instructors of students with mobility disabilities who become aware of a long-term repair of an elevator that could interfere with classroom access should contact Disability Resources/ Access Consultant or Classroom Scheduling about getting the class changed to another site.

Students Who are Blind or Have Low Vision

Students with vision disabilities should already be familiar with their surroundings after mobility and orientation training. They may not, however, be aware of emergency exits. Additionally, regardless of their prior training or experience, students who are blind or have low vision may be prevented from accurately orienting themselves due to the extra noise and commotion common to emergencies. Instructor assistance is critical to their safety.

- **During emergency evacuation:** Instructors must alert these students to the nature of the situation, offer them assistance, and guide them through the nearest emergency exit, out of the building, and to a safe distance.
- **When sheltering in place:** For emergencies (e.g., tornadoes) that require sheltering in a safe area inside the building, instructors must alert students who are blind or have low vision to the nature of the situation, offer them assistance, and guide them to the secure shelter location.

In all cases, a good way of offering assistance to a person who requires guidance is to use the "sighted guide" technique. The sighted person offers an elbow, which is grasped and held by the person with the vision disability. While guiding, the sighted person relays their current location to the guided person, advising of obstacles, debris, doorways, or narrow passages. Upon arrival to the appropriate place of safety, the guide orients the person who is blind or has low vision to the surroundings and determines if further assistance is needed.

Students Who Experience Seizures

Most people who have a seizure disorder are able to control their seizures through the use of medication; however, medical management of a seizure disorder is not completely effective for some people, so seizures may occur in the classroom. Students with an active seizure disorder will likely speak to their instructors about how to respond to their seizures, which for some may be infrequent or unexpected.

To assist individuals **during** their seizures,

- Do not restrain them;
- Keep objects away from their mouths;
- Cushion their heads with available sweaters, sweatshirts, coats, etc.; and
- Rotate them onto their sides.

To assist individuals **after** their seizures,

- Look for medical I.D. if the affected individuals are disorientated;
- Ask them to give their name and their present location; and
- McNally Smith Security, 651-361-3555, security@mcnallysmith.edu in case of marked confusion, incoherence, or inability to respond.

Call 9-1-1 for emergency assistance when affected individuals exhibit any of the following:

- Seizures lasting longer than one minute,
- Additional seizures immediately following in succession,
- Breathing difficulties,
- Faint or non-existent pulse, or
- Extreme disorientation after emerging from a seizure.

* Instructors should assess the situation and use their best judgment in determining the need for immediate medical intervention. Erring on the side of caution is usually the best course of action when a student is having a seizure.

Students who are D/deaf or Hard of Hearing

Students who are D/deaf or hard of hearing may not hear alarms or other audible warnings. Instructors should inform such students of an emergency. There are several ways to get a student's attention:

- Writing a note for the student, calling attention to the emergency and instructing where to go;
- Turning the light switch off and on to gain attention; or
- Tapping the person who is D/deaf or hard of hearing on the shoulder.

In most instances, there will be an interpreter or transcriber in the classroom to explain the emergency to the student. Provide any assistance a student might need during the evacuation process.

If a person is in need of specific assistance or would like to discuss a plan or to receive more information please contact the Disability Resources/ Access Consultant:

Corbett Laubignat MS CRC
Disability Resources/ Access Consultant
McNally Smith College of Music
Office of Student Life
19 Exchange Street East
St. Paul MN 55101
E-mail: Corbett.laubignat@mcnallysmith.edu
Phone: 651-361-3420

References:

<http://ods.osu.edu/faculty/instructor-handbook-teaching-students-with-disabilities/#best> -The Ohio State University, Instructor Handbook: Teaching Students with Disabilities.