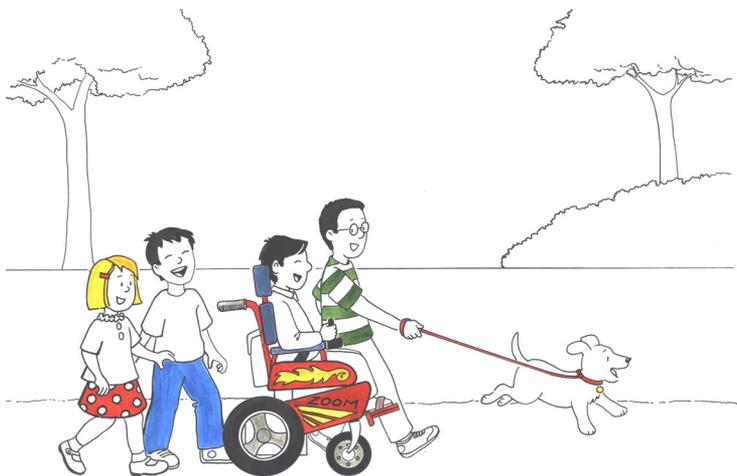


Power to Participate



**HEALTH CENTRE
FOR CHILDREN**

An agency of the Provincial
Health Services Authority

Introduction

Everyone needs to be able to take part and to be a part of daily life. We call this participation. For children and young people with disabilities this includes being able to:

- Play and explore
- Move around the classroom
- Play outside
- Get to different classes
- Join in sports and games
- Get out with their family and friends in the community

Power wheelchairs, powered toys and powered robots can all be used to help children with disabilities do these things. We call these kinds of tools power mobility.



Why Is It Important For My Child To Be Able To Get Around On His Or Her Own?

The first three years of life are a very important time of development for children. Moving around and exploring helps children develop social and learning skills. Children who cannot move around by themselves become passive. Their future learning may be affected.

Is My Child Too Young For Power Mobility?

Most children can walk by 12 to 18 months. Children with disabilities need the chance to move by themselves at the same age. This helps their overall development. Research suggests that children as young as 7 months can begin to use power mobility equipment. They can use a power wheelchair well between 18 and 24 months.

How Will Power Mobility Help My Child?

Research has shown that power mobility helps children with disabilities:

- Move around easily
- Do things without help
- Play and share with other children
- Initiate contact with others or with objects
- Be motivated to take part in activities
- Understand language and communicate with others
- Use their hands and arms
- Be more self-confident
- Participate with children their own age

Will using a power wheelchair stop my child learning to walk, or to use a manual wheelchair?

No. Research shows that motor skills do not decrease when children use power mobility.

Some studies have shown:

- Better use of motor skills
- More motivation in therapy

But what if my child can walk?

Power wheelchairs help in many ways. It takes more than twice the energy for children with disabilities to walk compared to children their own age. For children with many types of disabilities, it gets harder and much more tiring to walk as they get older. Using mobility aids such as power wheelchairs outdoors may also help people with disabilities keep walking indoors longer by not over-using muscles and joints.

Wouldn't it be better to push a manual wheelchair?

No. Wheelchairs are heavy and tiring to push when compared to the weight and strength of a child. A manual wheelchair may work well inside on smooth surfaces but can be difficult to use outside.

Very few children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) are able to push manual wheelchairs outdoors. They are pushed by adults. This prevents them keeping up with their friends and choosing where to go and what to do.

A child in a manual wheelchair should be able to go at the same speed and for the same distance as other children their age so they can keep up with their friends.



Who needs a power wheelchair?

- Children who have no other means of moving around
- Children who have inefficient mobility and can't keep up with other children
- Children who lose the ability to walk or walk efficiently
- Children who are less able to get around at times due to their illness

Adults may use a car for long distances, a bike when they want exercise, or choose to walk a short distance. In the same way, children with disabilities may crawl or walk in the house or use a walker or bike for exercise. They may be able to wheel a manual wheelchair on level surfaces. To help them keep up with friends on the playground or out in the community they need a power wheelchair.

Everyone finds it hard to pay attention when they are tired. If children tire themselves getting to class by walking or using a manual wheelchair, it can make it difficult for them to do well in school.

How can my child use a power wheelchair if he or she cannot hold onto a joystick?

There are lots of ways to use power wheelchairs. Joysticks are the most common but there are also switches and other special controls. Some children use switches with their hands and others use their head or other body part. An occupational therapist or physiotherapist can figure out the best way for your child to drive.

Ask your child's therapist if a referral to the Assistive Technology Team at Sunny Hill would help with this assessment.

How can I arrange for my child to begin using a power wheelchair?

Talk to your child's therapist. They may be able to borrow equipment for your child from one of the following sources:

- Child Development Centre
- Medical Equipment Supplier
- Red Cross Loan Bank
- Sunny Hill

They may suggest a referral to the Positioning and Mobility Team at Sunny Hill.

How can my child get a power wheelchair funded in British Columbia?

For children on the At Home program or children in care, power wheelchairs are funded as the main wheelchair. Only \$1500 is allowed for a manual chair. If your child's manual chair cost more than this, the power wheelchair will not be funded in full. Extra funding will be needed from service clubs or extended benefits. Another option would be to find a recycled chair in the Red Cross Loan Bank.

First Nations children may be funded through Health Canada rather than the At Home program. This program will only fund power wheelchairs for children who cannot wheel a manual wheelchair.

Further Information

HANDOUTS FROM SUNNY HILL

- Beginning Power Mobility: For Young Children with Cerebral Palsy
- Power mobility training ideas

FROM THE WEB

- www.childdevelopment.ca
- www.seatingandmobility.ca - see wheeled mobility section

About Sunny Hill

Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children is a provincial facility offering specialized services to children with disabilities, their families and communities throughout British Columbia. Using a family-centred approach, Sunny Hill helps promote the healthy development of children and youth by supporting families and community service providers in their efforts. It is also a resource for educational services and information about disabilities. Services are delivered close to home in a child's community, or on site at Sunny Hill, located in Vancouver.

How To Contact Us

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*Promoting Better Health for Children with Disabilities
through Clinical Services, Education and Research*