

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

“Stranger/Danger” Issues Faced By Individuals with Various Disabilities and Seniors

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Following, in the order received from the conference attendees, are comments, suggestions, and ideas about training students to recognize the potential danger of interaction with a stranger while moving to or from, or traveling on, a public transportation vehicle:

- The importance of learning from the family of a trainee during the assessment process what behaviors of the trainee are inappropriate
- The travel trainer must explain to the trainee that it is inappropriate to give money to a stranger if requested
- The travel trainer should discuss with the student who is, and who is not, a stranger
- Trainer must teach that a stranger is a person whom the trainee does not know
- The trainee should also be taught that there can be a “continuum” from a stranger to a person who becomes a friend; for example, if the trainee sees and talks with the same person at a bus stop time after time, that person may become a friend
- Again, the trainee needs to be taught that a stranger is a person whom you do not know
- While a trainee may ride on a bus or paratransit van every day, this does not necessarily mean that every passenger on that vehicle is the trainee’s friend
- One audience member pointed out that a police officer who becomes known to the trainee during the travel training process should be considered a friend
- Another audience member pointed out, however, that not every person in a uniform should be assumed to be a friend, since various types of uniforms are so easy to acquire these days
- It was also mentioned that students need to be taught to not become a victim
- Another commentor discussed the differences between a friend, an acquaintance, and a stranger, and that an acquaintance can become a friend, too, in a dangerous situation
- An attendee offered the following training scenario: if a student is approached by a stranger, teach the student to respond, “What? Are you talking to me? I don’t know you.” This teaches “boundary-building” to the student in the event of an encounter with a stranger
- Yet another attendee stated that the trainee will be riding on a public transportation vehicle where typically everyone is a stranger

- It was also stressed that in some situations, there is a thin line between normal human contact and inappropriate behavior
- An experienced travel trainer pointed out that repetitive training about “stranger/danger” issues is very important
- Travel trainers must spend time with the trainee on what is, and what is not, inappropriate behavior
- It was pointed out that public transportation drivers should receive training to be on the lookout for inappropriate contact between disabled and aging customers, and strangers
- Trainees should be instructed that if they are in a retail establishment and being approached inappropriately by a stranger, they should seek aid from the person behind the counter
- Another attendee reinforced that all of these situations go back to the assessment process; for example, when you do a staged “stranger/danger” situation, you have to let the student know that they handled the situation correctly
- When assigned a student for travel training, the trainer should ask the referring agency, “can you give me any information about the trainee that will help me to travel train the individual successfully?”
- The final question of this session concerned a specific travel training problem: an attendee discussed a student who was afraid to cross a street alone because of real or perceived danger. A route analysis was undertaken to find an easier and safer street crossing, and the student completed the travel training program successfully.