WALKING WITH OLDER ADULTS & DISABLED INDIVIDUALS

PRN-001: Walking with Older Adults & Disabled Individuals
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SIC Code: 88100 – Social Work Activities Without Accommodation for the Elderly and Disabled
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1. Policy Introduction

Walking with older adults and disabled individuals is a core companionship duty requiring patience, attentiveness, and professional conduct. This policy establishes the standards, procedures, and safety expectations for companions when escorting service users during walks, whether indoors, outdoors, or in transit. The aim is to ensure dignity, comfort, autonomy, and safety at all times.

2. Purpose

The purpose of PRN-167 is to:

- Provide clear, consistent guidance for companions supporting service users during walks.
- Promote safe, respectful, and person-centred mobility support.
- Reduce risk of falls, distress, fatigue, or unsafe movement.
- Ensure professional behaviour and communication throughout all walking activities.
- Align walking support with safeguarding, mobility, and conduct policies.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all:

- Companions supporting **older adults**.
- Companions supporting individuals with **physical**, **sensory**, or **cognitive disabilities**.

- Walks conducted **inside homes**, **community settings**, **public spaces**, or **to/from transport**.
- Walks undertaken **as part of work duties**, including leisure walks, escorting to appointments, or mobility practice.

This policy does **not** apply to personal errands, rushing home, or non-work-related movement.

4. Core Principles

- **Dignity First:** The service user's pace, comfort, and autonomy are the priority.
- **Safety Over Speed:** Companions must never rush, pull, push, or pressure the individual.
- **Professional Presence:** Calm, patient, and attentive conduct is mandatory.
- **Clear Communication:** Movements, turns, obstacles, and pace changes must be explained.
- **Environmental Awareness:** Hazards must be anticipated and avoided.
- **Consent-Based Support:** Physical assistance is offered, not imposed.

5. Standard Walking Procedure

5.1 Pre-Walk Assessment

Companions must:

- Check mobility aids (stick, walker, frame, wheelchair) for stability and correct setup.
- Observe the individual's balance, fatigue level, breathing, and emotional state.
- Confirm the destination, route, and expected duration.
- Assess weather, lighting, and environmental conditions.

5.2 Safe Positioning

Companions must:

- Walk slightly to the side and half a step behind the service user.
- Offer an arm only when requested or clearly needed.
- Avoid holding, pulling, or gripping unless preventing a fall.
- Maintain a supportive but non-intrusive presence.

5.3 Pace Management

Companions must:

- Match the service user's natural pace — even if extremely slow.
- Pause whenever the individual pauses.
- Allow rest breaks without showing frustration or impatience.
- Monitor signs of fatigue, dizziness, or confusion.

5.4 Communication Standards

Companions must:

- Use calm, reassuring language (e.g., "We'll take our time").
- Inform the individual before turning, stopping, stepping up/down, or changing pace.
- For visually impaired individuals: describe surroundings, obstacles, and surface changes.
- For cognitively impaired individuals: use gentle reminders, orientation cues, and reassurance.

5.5 Environmental Safety

Companions must:

- Scan continuously for uneven surfaces, wet floors, slopes, steps, clutter, or crowds.
- Avoid shortcuts that increase risk.
- Ensure adequate lighting and visibility.
- Maintain awareness of weather conditions (rain, wind, glare, heat).

5.6 Support for Disabled Individuals

- **Wheelchair Users:**
    - Walk at their chosen pace.
    - Never push without consent.
    - Ensure brakes, footrests, and seating are secure.
- **Cognitive Disabilities:**
    - Use simple instructions, reassurance, and slow transitions.
    - Avoid overstimulation or confusing environments.

- **Sensory Disabilities:**
    - Adapt communication to hearing, visual, or sensory needs.
    - Provide clear verbal guidance or tactile cues where appropriate.

6. Relevant Policies

PRN-167 is supported by the following organisational policies:

- **MT01 Safeguarding Adults Awareness** — Safety, dignity, respect, and risk awareness.
- **Professional Boundaries & Conduct Policy** — Behaviour expectations, communication standards, and physical contact rules.
- **Mobility Support / Manual Handling Awareness** — Safe mobility techniques, fall-prevention, and correct use of aids.
- **Person-Centred Support Policy** — Tailoring support to individual pace, preferences, and abilities.
- **Companion Roles & Responsibilities** — Observation, reporting, dignity maintenance, and procedural compliance.

7. Professional Conduct Expectations

Companions must:

- Remain patient, calm, and attentive throughout the walk.
- Avoid personal conversations, phone use, or distractions.
- Maintain a supportive tone and avoid showing frustration.
- Ensure the individual feels safe, respected, and never burdensome.
- Uphold confidentiality and professional boundaries at all times.

8. Prohibited Actions

The following actions are strictly forbidden:

- Rushing or urging the individual to “walk faster”.
- Pulling, dragging, pushing, or steering without consent.
- Walking ahead and expecting the individual to follow.
- Leaving the individual unattended at any point.
- Ignoring signs of fatigue, dizziness, confusion, or distress.

- Using mobility aids incorrectly or without training.
- Taking unsafe shortcuts or exposing the individual to hazards.

9. Incident Response

If the individual becomes unstable, distressed, or fatigued:

1. Stop immediately.
2. Offer a seat, rest break, or alternative support.
3. Provide reassurance and assess the cause.
4. Notify the shift lead if mobility changes or concerns are observed.
5. Record the incident in the daily log.
6. Complete a safeguarding report if risk indicators are present.

10. Documentation Requirements

Companions must record:

- Any mobility concerns observed during the walk.
- Environmental hazards encountered.
- Signs of decline, instability, or repeated difficulty.
- Any incidents, near-misses, or changes in mobility.
- Communication challenges or behavioural changes.

Reports must be submitted to management promptly.

11. Training Requirements

All companions must complete:

- Mobility Support Training
- Manual Handling Awareness
- Communication with Older Adults
- Disability-Inclusive Support Training
- Safeguarding Adults Training
- Professional Boundaries & Conduct Training

Training must be refreshed annually or as required.

12. Final Statement

Walking with older adults and disabled individuals is a professional responsibility requiring patience, safety awareness, and person-centred care. Companions must always prioritise the individual's pace, comfort, autonomy, and dignity. Adherence to this policy ensures safe, respectful, and high-quality companionship support.