



## Teacher Aide Safety

The safety of teachers and teacher aides working with students with disabilities is essential and can involve difficult circumstances. Workers' compensation claims often arise from injuries due to physical interactions with students with disabilities, but also include injuries from slips, trips, falls, and lifting incidents. Many teacher aides are injured by slipping on wet floors in hallways or cafeterias, tripping over cords and backpacks, or falling off a chair while reaching overhead. Teacher aides can also get hurt by lifting or transferring students. Considering the various causes of injury, utilize the following preventive measures to protect staff and students.

### Common Claims

- *Use Proper Lifting Techniques:* Bend at the knees, not the back
- *Move Students Safely:* Ask for assistance or use mechanical aids when moving students
- *Reaching Overhead:* Use a step ladder when reaching overhead in the classroom; do not use a chair or desk for climbing
- *Lifting Heavy:* Keep heavy items at waist level when lifting and moving

### Understand the Student's Needs

- *Read Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):* Know the student's triggers, communication style, mobility limits, and behavior management plans
- *Know Medical Alerts:* Be aware of allergies, seizure disorders, or other medical conditions

### Maintain a Safe Environment

- *Clear Space:* Remove tripping hazards, sharp objects, or unsafe materials
- *Arrange Furniture for Accessibility:* Ensure wheelchairs, walkers, or sensory equipment can move safely
- *Have an Exit Plan:* Know how to safely leave or help a student exit in case of an emergency or escalation

### Use Safe Behavior Support Techniques

- *Stay Calm and Predictable:* A calm tone and clear, consistent instructions reduce anxiety and escalation
- *Respect Personal Space:* Maintain an appropriate distance, especially when a student is upset
- *De-Escalation First:* Use verbal redirection, visual cues, or sensory breaks before physical intervention



- *Follow Proper Training:* Annual school-specific training requirements should be followed

## Protect Yourself and Others

- *Appropriate Footwear:* Wear closed-toe, comfortable shoes for mobility and safety
- *Secure Personal Items:* Avoid wearing dangling jewelry or lanyards that can be grabbed
- *Situational Awareness:* Always be aware of the surroundings and student behavior
- *Stick Together:* Use a buddy system with other staff when working with students who have high support needs
- *Be Timely:* Report and document all injuries or incidents immediately

In New York State, many school districts utilize the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools (TCIS) program while working in classrooms that support disabilities. It has been adopted by BOCES and individual districts across the state to help staff manage crises, de-escalate aggressive behavior, and reduce the need for physical restraint.

- **Training and certification:** The program involves extensive training for staff, including initial certification and annual refresher courses to maintain skills in areas like de-escalation and physical restraint techniques.
- **Benefits:** Schools report that implementing TCIS leads to increased staff confidence and effectiveness in managing crises and helps reduce the need for physical restraint.
- **Program provider:** Cornell University's Residential Child Care Project (RCCP) developed the TCIS model. RCCP disseminates the model and certified trainers conduct the training. [TCIS Information Bulletin](#)
- **Behavioral Support Fact Sheet:** If teacher safety involves the use of physical restraints, NYS produced a frequently asked questions [fact sheet](#) that covers the updates to behavioral support and interventions in schools as of August 2023.

Ensuring safety for students with disabilities and teachers is a shared responsibility built on awareness, preparation, and compassion. As a teacher aide, your calm presence, understanding of each student's needs, and adherence to safety practices help create an environment where every student can learn and thrive. By staying informed, working collaboratively as part of a team, and adhering to established procedures, you can effectively protect yourself and your students.