

**Responsibly
promoting
independence,
safety, and
personal
dignity**

Straps and Supports on Adaptive Products



“My students depend on positioning aids in order to sit properly and maintain good posture. This allows them to engage in a host of meaningful and therapeutic activities while feeling secure, and it can help prevent deformities. Thank goodness Rifton recognizes this; their equipment is fitted with appropriate straps and supports to help my kids enjoy a richer educational experience”

Karen Pierz, PT
Naperville School District
Naperville, Illinois

Good positioning is critical. When we sit we need to be supported in a healthy posture. This is particularly important for people with physical disabilities. For them, poor positioning can mean poor development, poor health, even poor education. Adaptive equipment must provide a wide range of special supports so that even those with complex orthopedic issues can be positioned for comfort, independence, and health.

As all good clinicians know well, the right positioning support helps clients maintain their posture and limit involuntary movement as they do activities with their head and hands. It also helps them avoid developing deformities such as scoliosis. The right supports also prevent clients from falling out of equipment or injuring themselves in other ways. Supports to perform all these functions can take the form of straps, belts, blocks, and harnesses.

Unfortunately such special supports can also be abused. Occasionally there are reports of straps being used to restrain the movement of a person with behavioral issues, usually for discipline or punishment. This is abusive and wrong.

There are many factors that must be considered for responsible use of adaptive equipment, and there is helpful information available from a variety of sources, such as we have included on the following pages.

IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires individualized assessment of students with disabilities. To the extent adaptive equipment (including straps and supports) is needed to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student, the school district may be required to provide that equipment at no cost to the student's family. Adequate support is a student's right.



“This Activity Chair is amazing. We are so happy to see students who have been challenging to position now able to sit upright and have control over their head, neck, and arms in order to participate in activities.”

Derian Anderson, OTR/L
Duval County Public Schools
Jacksonville, Florida

Federal Guidelines

In 2012 the U.S. Department of Education published [Restraint and Seclusion](#), a resource document to help schools, staff and parents navigate the issues surrounding the use of restraints in the classroom.

Importantly, the report recognized that in specific circumstances, equipment that physically restricts a student's movement should be used in the best interest of the student. It suggested that “adaptive devices or mechanical supports used to achieve proper body position, balance, or alignment to allow greater freedom of mobility than would be possible without the use of such devices or mechanical supports” should not be considered mechanical restraints when used by trained school personnel or prescribed by an appropriate professional. It treats such equipment similarly to vehicle seatbelts or child car seats, which also restrain movement in the interest of the student.

The report further provides fifteen principles which emphasize that adaptive equipment should never be used for restraint or punishment.

State and Local Guidelines

Many states and localities have rules about the use of restraints. Often these mirror the federal guidelines or have only minor changes. Appendix A to Restraint and Seclusion (referenced above) provides a state-by-state list of the rules and guidelines that have been adopted.

Professional Guidelines

In 2013 the Rehabilitative Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) issued a policy paper titled [RESNA Position on the Application of Wheelchairs, Seating Systems, and Secondary Supports for Positioning vs Restraint](#) providing excellent guidelines and clarifications for anyone concerned about the abuse of special supports. Its primary purpose is to help practitioners make decisions and provide evidence from clinical literature.

Importantly, it reminds us that “seating systems provide postural support and stability that enable greater function and minimize the risk of secondary medical complications such as pressure ulcers and joint contractures. These products can result in greater freedom of mobility than would be possible without the support.”



“Having the right supports and positioning aids on the Rifton Activity Chair enables our teaching teams to try out new ideas and new ways for positioning, supporting, engaging and teaching our students. The increased support helps us teach functional sitting and sit-to-stand skills, allowing us to significantly improve the lives of the students and families we serve.”

Sheila Wolfe, OT
Yolo County Office of Education
Sacramento, California

Other Resources

- [Restraint and Seclusion](#), U.S. Department of Education, 2012.
- [RESNA Position on the Application of Wheelchairs, Seating Systems, and Secondary Supports for Positioning vs Restraint](#), Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Society of North America, 2013.
- [“The Pelvis: Using Secondary Supports in Positioning”](#) by Michelle L. Lange, Mobility Management, online edition, 2008.
- [“The Fundamental Principles of Seating and Positioning in Children and Young People with Physical Disabilities”](#) by Laura Neville, University of Ulster and James Leckey Design, Northern Ireland, 2005.
- [“Restraints: Achieving Successful Seating Outcomes While Addressing Restraint Concerns”](#) by Don Olson, DPT, NRRTS Directions, 2014.
- [“Child Safety: Concerning Appropriate Use of Straps and Supports with Rifton Chairs”](#) by Karen Pierz, PT, Rifton website, 2012.
- “Seating Intervention and Postural Control” by J. Presperin Pederson and M. Lange, Olson & DeRuyter, Clinician’s Guide to Assistive Technology, Mosby, 2002.
- Special Seating: An Illustrated Guide by Jean Anne Zollars, DPT. Prickly Pear Publications, 2010.
- [State by State Listing of Disability Advocacy Organizations](#) published by Neighborhood Legal Services, Buffalo, New York, 2014.
- [National Disability Rights Network](#), Washington, DC.

Guidelines from Rifton

Every strap and support on a Rifton product is designed exclusively for postural support and safety, not restraint. We offer these guidelines to ensure that our equipment is used to provide maximum benefit to our clients:

- Never leave a client unattended when straps or supports are in use. If a client needs a strap then special supervision is required.
- Use adequate straps and supports to prevent the client from falling from or slipping out of equipment.
- If you are not sure how much support to use, seek professional advice from an appropriate clinician or trained school personnel. To assess whether a strap or support benefits the client consider the following:
 - ▷ Does the support improve the client's ability to function in this position?
 - ▷ Does the support permit a range of motion that the client can control?
 - ▷ Can the client maintain good postural alignment in a given position, or would additional supports help prevent deformities?
 - ▷ Does the support help prevent a client from falling out of equipment or from injury?
- Don't leave a client in one piece of equipment or in one position too long.
- Regularly reassess how much support a client needs.
- The presence of a particular strap on a piece of adaptive equipment does not mean it must be used in all cases.
- Always read the product manual before using a piece of equipment.



“The pelvic harness on our chair is a perfect design for supporting both pelvic alignment and external rotation at the hips. The most important factor is how comfortable, functional, and straight the kids are in the chair!”

Judi Rogers, OTR/L
Mount Vernon, Washington