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BACK CARE AND LIFTING IN CHILD CARE

Frequent lifting and carrying of children in the child care setting can increase the risk of long-term discomfort and damage to your back. If performed poorly, lifting places a significant strain on many parts of your body. It is intended that the following information and strategies will assist you in ensuring your back safety in the work place. Please ensure that you seek advice from relevant therapists regarding a child's individual needs.



PLANNING THE LIFT & PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

Remember to:

- Wear flat, sturdy closed toe foot wear with a non-slip sole
- Where possible, plan your daily routine to minimise the need to lift and carry a child
- Consider using more than one person to perform a lift. Two-person lifts should be performed if a child is heavy or displays strong or unpredictable movements. Ensure that both people understand and are confident about what is required of them during a lift. Work together and maintain clear communication e.g. clarify that both people will lift on "Go". Let the child know what you are doing at all times.
- Use mechanical devices such as a hoist, if required. Ensure that all people involved in operating the equipment have received adequate training
- Make use of equipment with wheels (e.g. stroller, wheelchair) to minimise the need to lift
- Apply brakes on equipment such as a wheelchair (except for a hoist)
- Plan the lift and prepare the environment. Clear away any obstacles and ensure sufficient space
- Always ask for assistance if the child is too heavy or when you do not feel confident



PERFORMING THE LIFT

- Stand comfortably with your feet shoulder-width apart for a stable base
- Lower yourself into a semi-squat position, bending at the knees. In this stance, your legs have their greatest strength to do most of the work
- Hold the child as close to your body as possible whilst standing and tighten your stomach muscles without holding your breath. Maintain the spine in its natural curves.
- To move the child, turn by pivoting your feet. Do not twist your body.
- To lower the child, continue to bend your knees with the child positioned close to your body.

*Be aware of the most secure way to hold a child to prevent unexpected movements during a lift. The child's therapist or parents should be able to advise you about this.

Also, stretching for a few minutes before and after work or during a break can reduce the risk of injury to your back. It can also improve energy levels and flexibility!

MEAL TIMES

- When possible, position yourself directly in front of a child at their level to reduce unwanted twisting or bending of your back
- Avoid leaning excessively forward when feeding a child. With repetition, this can cause stress to your lower back

CHILD-SIZED CHAIRS AND TABLES

When working with children who are sitting at child-sized tables and chairs, it is wise to use a low chair or stool whilst assisting with activities. Some low stools are fitted with castors to allow greater ease of movement.





WORKING ON THE FLOOR

Use a variety of kneeling and sitting positions rather than leaning over while standing.



Frequently getting up and down from the floor can put a strain on your knees and back. Therefore, try to ensure that you have everything you need before sitting down with a child. Gather all toys in a basket before you get up and put them away. Get up from the floor through kneeling then half kneeling, as it is easier on your knees than getting up from squatting.

NAPPY CHANGES

There are a number of options for positioning a child for changing. These may include:

- Lifting a child onto a change table at waist height (may require a two-person lift)
- Rolling a child from side to side rather than lifting to remove a nappy
- Supporting a child to climb up steps to a change table (some are available with handrails)
- Using a change mat on the floor. Adopt a comfortable position in which you have maximum control over the child's movements without placing unnecessary strain on your knees or back. Take care in lifting a child onto and from the floor
- Using an electric hoist or a high-low change bench



This information was developed by the Noah's Ark SET Program as a guide for child care workers. For specialist advice or if you are concerned about your back health, please contact your employer, GP, Physiotherapist or other health professional