

Injury Prevention in Childcare

Loss Control Bulletin

Working with children can be a rewarding experience. It is a chance to guide and nurture them as they grow into themselves. We all know that children need to be protected from harm and much of the training employees receive is directed at protecting the children from accidents and injury. Yet, employees are also exposed to situations and activities while performing childcare that could lead to injury to themselves. This guide provides tips for employees to help them avoid back injuries when working with children.

Providing care for energetic children can be physically demanding work. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle that includes regular exercise may help protect against stress and strain injuries.

Childcare providers should wear comfortable clothes that allow them to move freely and flat shoes with closed toes and heels and rubber or urethane soles to reduce the possibility of injury.

Job duties that are the most common cause of back injury include sudden moves to prevent injury to a child, picking up children, pushing large strollers, sitting on the ground or in child-size furniture, reaching for a falling object or child, and handling toys, equipment, and supplies.

When lifting, follow correct lifting techniques described below.

- Size up the job. Know your limitations. Get help if the load is too heavy. Use a hand truck or other lifting aid for supplies and equipment.
- Make sure the pathway you will travel is clear.
- When ready to lift, take a good stance with your feet planted solidly near the object. Place your feet about the width of your shoulders apart or place one foot slightly ahead of the other.
- Bend your knees and crouch next to the load. Keep the load as close to your body as possible during the lift.
- Get a firm and secure grip with your hands. Bulky objects may require that one hand be lower than the other and at the opposite corners of the load. It may be necessary to partially lift the load and then secure a better grip that can be held throughout the lift and carry.
- Start the lift slowly by straightening your knees and lifting with your legs.
- Exhale as you lift.
- To lower a heavy object to the ground once it has been picked up, reverse the lifting process.
- To change directions, move your feet. Do not twist at the torso.
- If the object has sharp edges or slivers wear gloves.
- Avoid or minimize all lifting above shoulder height.

When Lifting Children

Lift a child only when absolutely necessary. If you must lift a child and are unsure of the weight of the child, start with a “test lift” by lifting the child one or two inches off the surface to determine if you can

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safely complete the lift. When lifting a child, it is important to get a good grip. Setting the child on your forearm and placing your other arm behind the child's back is one way of lifting a child.

You can also lift a child by placing a hand under each arm and extending your fingers around the child's back.

You can substantially reduce exposures to back injuries associated with daycare operations by using the right equipment and adjusting lifting protocols.

- Use adjustable height changing tables or tables with built-in steps to help a child climb onto the changing area to reduce lifting. If using a free-standing step stool to enable the child to climb onto the changing table, stand close by and watch the child climb the steps or take the child's hand to provide balance and stability.
- Changing tables should be at the adult's waist height to avoid excessive bending. Step up stools can be used to help children walk up to the changing table.
- Have the child walk upstairs rather than carrying him or her.
- Lower the crib sides before lifting children out of the crib.
- Provide adult-size chairs and tables for workers to use.
- Don't sit in or on child-size chairs, tables, or desks. This requires acute bending and awkward postures that can lead to muscle strain.
- Avoid bending at the waist by getting down to the child's level. Kneel on one knee or sit on the floor to get to the child's level. However, be aware that you do not want to spend too much time sitting on the floor.
- Minimize time spent sitting on the floor as this can result in back strains when getting up.
- Workers should not stand on chairs and tables for any reason. Falls can result in serious back pain and injuries.
- To minimize strains from lifting, use multi-seat carriers or strollers when transporting children to outdoor play areas.

Sometimes worker injuries are caused by the need for a sudden response to prevent injury to a child. An attendant could easily be injured by tripping over toys while running across a room to prevent an accident. During an emergency, workers may respond with little regard to personal safety resulting in their own injury. Identification and elimination of potential hazards can reduce the occurrence of such emergencies. Below are some safety tips that apply to specific areas of your operations.

Kitchen Safety Tips

- Place the heaviest items on racks and shelves at waist height.
- Use upper cabinets and top shelves to store light items.
- Use a sturdy stepstool or ladder to reach upper shelves. Do not stand on chairs.
- Use sturdy stepstools adequate to support workers of all sizes.
- Reduce the size and weight of garbage bags to make lifting easier.

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- Use carts to transport supplies and garbage rather than carrying the load.
- Store ladders and other tools out of reach of children.
- Secure storage racks and lockers to walls to prevent them from falling over or being pulled down by a child.
- Always keep children out of the kitchen.

Slip and Fall Injuries

Many back injuries are due to slips and falls. Eliminating conditions that can give rise to slips and falls will help prevent such injuries.

- Wear flat shoes with closed toes and heels made of rubber, urethane, or other slip resistant material.
- Clean up spills immediately.
- Keep floors in good repair. No loose or torn carpeting.
- Pick up toys when children have finished playing with them.
- Promptly remove snow and ice from walkways and parking lots.
- Wear snow boots when walking in snow or on ice. Where the presence of ice cannot be eliminated, consider the use of snow and ice cleats that can be attached to boots.
- Avoid walking on ice or snow while carrying a child. Keep your hands available to help balance you or prevent or cushion a fall.
- Use handrails when ascending or descending stairs.
- Perform any work requiring the use of a ladder or step stool before the arrival of children or during nap time.

In summary

When working with children, the child's safety is important, but the workers' safety is also important. Assess the job to be performed and follow the correct lifting techniques to keep you safe and healthy at work. When you incorporate safe practices for childcare into your safety program, you will help ensure worker safety.