

All of the movements performed in early and middle education and care settings—or even one of these movements—can put a strain on your back resulting in an injury and potentially causing long-term chronic pain. This article encourages educators to think and ask themselves:

"How can I do this safely?"

Lets consider our backs for a moment...

Take a moment to think about how many times you bend and stretch throughout your day, reaching up and down, over and under, to the left and to the right.

Many educators consider back injuries as part and parcel of the workplace, but instead, they are avoidable.

This article (adapted from Back to the Future: Childcare and the risk of back injury, Rattler 81, Autumn, 2007) by Vanessa McQuarrie reports on how you can reduce the strain

A study on the occupational health and safety risks inherent in working with small children by Catherine Seal (Rattler 66) grouped risky behaviours into the following categories:

Bending and lifting:

Includes picking up children and lifting of both heavy and light objects.

Bending and the work environment:

Bending necessitated by the fact that furniture and equipment is designed to be appropriate to children rather than purposely constructed for adults.



Another potential risky action is reaching up above the shoulders.

Your back is your responsibility.

The lifting of children presented the most risk of injury.

Most injuries were found to be occurring early in the morning when educators were:

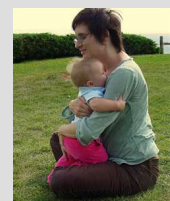
- setting up equipment
- greeting families
- soothing children
- at the end of the day when muscles are tired



Remedial therapists warn that the biggest danger is picking up children and putting them on your hip, causing the spine to curve.

Some practical advice:

- Consider where you are in space—get down and sit on the floor or position yourself so that you are down at the child's level with the child as an alternative to picking them up.
- Find out the safe Occupational Health and Safety recommended ways to approach daily tasks through training or seeking advice from your Director or your Workplace Safety Representative.



Make your job easier and safer each day by warming up and stretching. Its good for you and it feels great!

Step One: the Warm Up

Why warm up? - A warm up (prior to stretching) prepares the body both physically and psychologically for activity and is seen as an essential and successful preventative activity. A warm up does this in a number of ways.

- Raises the temperature in muscles and increases circulation around joints.
- Increases oxygen delivery to the muscles so that they are available for activity.
- Encourages faster and stronger muscle contraction.
- Is important to remember that the movement of the major muscle groups is the key to successfully warming up.

Step Two: the Stretch

Why Stretch now? - After warming up for about five minutes, be sure to slowly stretch. Stretching creates flexibility and lowers the risk of injury. **Never stretch cold muscles or you risk tearing them, warm up first.** Try some:

- Head half circles, first one way and then the other, to the front and to the back
- Arm circles
- Calf and quadriceps stretches
- Hold each stretch for at least fifteen seconds and do not bounce up and down while stretching. Breathe normally during all stretching.



Back care in your early childhood setting.

By looking after yourself and your back while you are working provides and opportunity for positive role-modeling and conversations around self care. Outcome 3 of the Early Years Learning Framework is to support children to develop a 'Strong sense of wellbeing' (Pg 31). By ensuring that we care for our backs and incorporate this into our interactions with children we are supporting children to take 'increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing', as part of the Outcome 3 EYLF (pg 32).

Children demonstrate their understanding of outcome 3 when they can recognise and increasingly act in ways that prevent personal injury in play.



As educators we can promote this understanding by being a positive role-model.

Demonstrating as part of regular practice the need to warm the body and stretch as to prevent personal injury and asking for assistance when moving or lifting heavy objects.



For more information:

- www.wst.tas.gov.au/publications/workplace_safety
- www.careforkids.com.au/childcarenews/2010/march/story2.html
- www.safework.sa.gov.au/

