Bending, Lifting, and Carrying Little Ones: Preventing Back and Shoulder Injuries Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Childcare workplaces constant physical demands on the body. Educators regularly bend to pick up toys, lift infants from cribs, guide toddlers down from play structures, and carry children who are tired or upset. Repeating these movements many times a day puts strain on the back, shoulders, and neck. Most injuries develop gradually from improper lifting and posture, leading to chronic pain and time away from work. Protecting your body helps you stay healthy and continue caring for children safely.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Back and shoulder injuries are among the most common occupational risks in childcare. These injuries rarely come from one major accident. More often, they develop gradually through repeated lifting, bending, and awkward movements throughout the day

Repetitive Strain

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that musculoskeletal disorders account for about 30% of workplace injuries requiring time off, with lifting and bending as leading causes.

Awkward Positions

NIOSH identifies frequent bending, twisting, reaching, and lifting from low heights—such as cribs or floor-level activities—as major contributors to back injuries. Tasks like lifting infants from cribs, helping toddlers at floor level, or reaching into low

storage areas force caregivers to work far from a neutral posture.

Unpredictable Loads

Children rarely stay still during lifts. A toddler may suddenly twist, lean away, or cling to the caregiver. These sudden shifts in weight increase the risk of muscle strain, especially if the caregiver is already bending or off balance.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Injury prevention starts with how you move.

Preventing back and shoulder injuries starts with how you move throughout the day. Using proper lifting techniques and body positioning reduces strain and helps protect your spine during routine childcare tasks.

Use Safe Body Mechanics

- **Keep a Neutral Spine:** Avoid rounding or over-arching your back. Maintain a natural spine position.
- **Engage Your Core:** Tighten core muscles before lifting to stabilize the spine.
- **Lift With Your Legs:** Bend at the hips and knees, not the waist, and push through your legs to stand.
- **Keep Children Close:** Holding a child close to your body reduces strain on your back.
- **Move Your Feet:** Turn your whole body instead of twisting your spine while holding a child.

Lifting Infants Safely

Position yourself close before lifting. Kneel or lower yourself instead of bending from the waist. Support the infant’s head and hips, bring the child close to your chest, and rise slowly using your legs. When lifting from cribs, lower the rail if possible and avoid leaning in with a rounded back.

Guiding and Lifting Toddlers

Encourage toddlers to participate. Ask them to step closer or raise their arms. Keep your feet shoulder-width apart for balance and bring the child close to your body before lifting. Avoid lifting from the side or twisting while holding them.

Carrying Children

Keep children centered against your body to reduce strain. Alternate sides regularly and avoid carrying children on one hip for long periods. When setting a child down, bend at the hips and knees instead of rounding your back.

Reduce Strain During Daily Tasks

Adjust diapering tables when possible, kneel or sit instead of bending repeatedly, and keep frequently used items within easy reach. During transitions like putting on shoes or coats, use stools or kneeling positions to maintain good posture.

Pay Attention to Early Warning Signs

Stiffness, shoulder tightness, tingling, or reduced movement can signal strain. Address discomfort early by adjusting technique, taking short breaks, stretching gently, and reporting concerns before small issues become serious injuries.

FINAL WORD

Your body is one of your most valuable tools in childcare. Safe lifting and movement are not about working slower. They are about working smarter.