



Keep a chair in the coat room so that you can sit down to interact with children instead of bending forward.

Reducing lifting and bending in child care

By Jesse Marchand

Working with young children may involve some actions or movements that can present the risk of musculoskeletal injury (MSI). In this safety talk, learn ergonomic tips about your workspace that can reduce the risk.

The daily tasks of child care add up. From changing diapers, cleaning up, and storing toys, to lifting children and dealing with noise, there are a lot of potential risks for injury. Force, repetition, awkward posture, and contact stress (when a hard or sharp object comes in contact with the skin) are all risk factors for MSI.

What is an MSI? It's an injury or disorder of the body's soft tissues, such as muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves, blood vessels, and joints of the neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, legs, and back. Injuries can include sprains, strains, or inflammation and these injuries may be caused or aggravated by work.

"Teachers and child care workers already take the time to create a space that is safe for children," says

WorkSafeBC ergonomist Gina Vahlas. These tips are designed to get them thinking about ways to design the space that reduce risk of injury for themselves. "Making a few changes to your space can provide more opportunities to reduce risk and work safely."

The following tips provide five ways that you can reduce the risks from repeated lifting and bending:

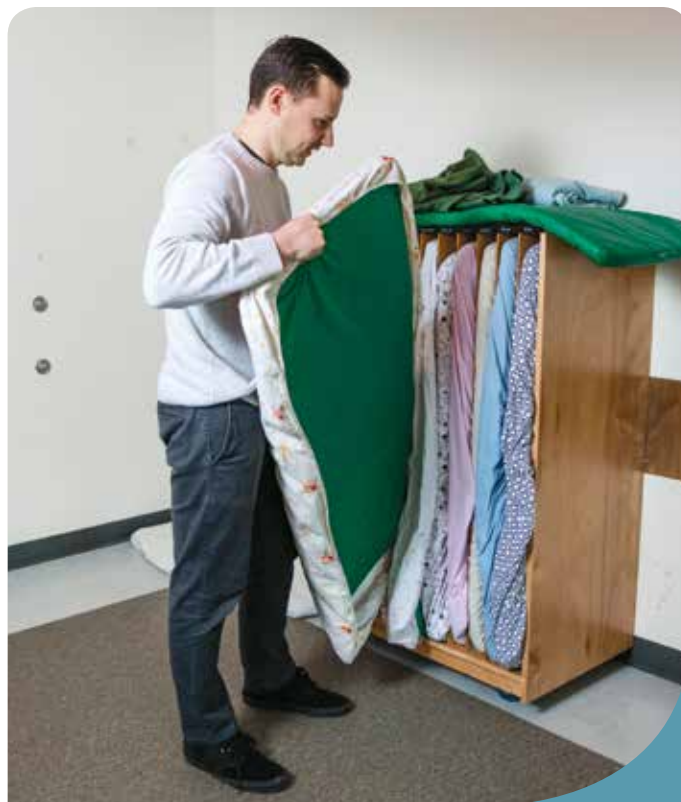
- 1 Sit down to interact with children.** Instead of bending forward for an extended length of time, try sitting down. When sitting, choose a chair with a comfortable height to lessen the stress on your knees. If you need to sit on the floor for nap time, try using a stadium seat with a back support or sit on a cushion up against a wall.
- 2 Put stairs next to changing stations.** Put stairs that children can use next to changing tables. That way, you can walk the children up the stairs, rather than lifting them multiple times throughout the day.
- 3 Use equipment and furniture that will allow you to work in upright positions.** Rather than bending over to pick up toys from the floor, collect them with a long-handled rake and lobby dustpan. Use

a long-handled mop to wipe down tables. If you need to clean a short table, support your upper body weight by placing your hand on your thigh when bending forward. Don't forget to walk around the table when wiping, to minimize reaching.

- 4 **Store sleep mats vertically.** To reduce the degree and frequency of bending down to pick up and stack cots on the floor, try storing them vertically. This way you can stand up while storing and taking out mats.
- 5 **Lift children as little as possible.** If you need to comfort a child, get them to sit with you. If you do need to carry a child, hold the child in front of your body instead of on your hip, and keep your hips and knees in a neutral posture. You will also want to watch your wrists; keeping them straight will reduce the risk of injury.

For more information

WorkSafeBC has a number of resources relating to child care safety. These include information sheets on a variety of work tasks from changing diapers or toileting, to setting up coat rooms and eating areas, to reducing stress and noise. Find them by searching for “child care workers” on worksafebc.com. ☺



Reduce the degree and frequency of bending by storing mats in a vertical storage cupboard.

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