

Childcare Ergonomics

Ergonomics is a way of designing the job, equipment, tools, and tasks to fit the worker and help avoid injuries. Ergonomics covers all physical aspects of a job.

Including:

- Biomechanical: Which includes stress on muscles, nerves, bones, and joints
- Sensory: Which includes hearing and vision
- Environmental: Which includes lighting, noise, temperature, and humidity

The most common ergonomic disorders seen in those who work with young children are:

- Back Injuries: Short and long term pain that reduce the ability to be productive
- Chronic Back Pain: Reoccurring pain that changes the way one works and behaves
- Tendonitis: Tendon inflammation resulting in burning pain, stiffness, and sometimes swelling
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: Compression of the median nerve resulting in numbness, tingling sensation, and pain

Warm-Ups & Stretches

Prepare to lift by warming up the muscles. Muscles, tendons and ligaments are not prepared to meet the physical stress of handling childcare tasks when they are not "warmed up". They are more likely to pull, tear or cramp when stretched or contracted suddenly. This is painful enough by itself but can lead to more serious and permanent injury if physical work is continued. Warming up for physically demanding tasks are important when working with children.

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Problem: Incorrect lifting of children, toys, supplies, equipment, etc.

Suggestions

Use proper lifting and carrying techniques. Shuffle your feet when you turn instead of twisting at the waist. Locate objects within easy reach where possible and keep access clear. Try job rotation where possible. Encourage independence in children whenever feasible. Use rigid containers.

Problem: Inadequate work heights (e.g. child-size tables and chairs)

Suggestions

Find a chair that will allow you to slide your legs under the table. Use safe, adult-size chairs for occasional use.

Problem: Frequent sitting on the floor with back unsupported

Suggestions

When possible, sit against a wall or furniture for back support. Perform stretching exercises. Have children come to you as much as possible.

Problem: Excessive reaching above shoulder height to obtain stored supplies

Suggestions

Redesign areas, placing heaviest items at waist height. Reorganize snacks and supplies to simplify snack preparation procedures. Utilize step stools when retrieving items above cupboard height.

Problem: Excessive reaching to the floor

Suggestions

Reduce the use of deep shelves or bins to avoid bending. Use proper body mechanics. Have toddlers use steps in order to decrease the distance between you and the children.

Problem: Frequent lifting of children

Suggestions

Use proper body mechanics. Have toddlers use steps in order to decrease the distance between you and the children.

Problem: Carrying garbage, toys, and materials

Suggestions

Use carts to transport heavy items. Relocate carts closer to areas before the move. Reduce the size and weight of loads. Use proper body mechanics.

Check your facility often to identify behaviors and conditions that create unnecessary risk of injury. Proactive efforts help to create a more ergonomically correct facility.

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Please contact the Loss Control team at:
losscontrol@bhhc.com for any further questions.