



CODES OF SAFE PRACTICES – SPECIAL EDUCATION

Lifting and transferring students may be easy when children are babies. Without assistive lifting devices and proper body mechanics, as their weight increases so do the risks for back injuries. The risk increases even more with children who are combative, tug, and/or drop. Most back injuries are not a result of *one bad lift*, but rather from a combination of bad body mechanics, poor posture, loss of flexibility, and a general decline in physical fitness.

Lifting/Transferring Assistive Aid Safety Rules

- A. **Use any mechanical help that the county provides.** Mechanical help would include a Hoyer lift, hoist, or other assistive lifting devices. These types of equipment eliminate the need for manually lifting or moving students. The biggest excuse for not using mechanical lifting devices is that they are time consuming. So are back injuries! Learn to use the hoists, lifts, or other assistive devices that the county provides. As you become more proficient with them, they will take less time.
- B. **Use gait/transfer belt and make sure they are securely fastened.** A gait belt provides a solid handhold on a student, which makes it easier to lift, handle, and transfer them. If you are only holding onto a tee shirt and a student goes down, chances are good that the tee shirt will be in your hand and the student will be on the floor! Gait/transfer belts provide a solid handle on the student so you can guide and transfer them.

Individual Lift/Transfer Safety Rules

Having a plan in place for the safe lifting and transferring of all students will help reduce the risk of back injuries. Being prepared and well trained to lift and transfer student properly is an important step in back injury prevention.

- A. **Develop an SOP (standard operating procedures) for the transfer of *each* student.** Just as you assess the nutritional needs of each student yearly, the lifting and transferring needs must also be evaluated annually. Has the student's weight reached a level where they are now a "two-person" lift? Can they help with a standing-pivot transfer to the commode? Are they on new medication that makes them combative? Transfer procedures must be updated regularly as each student's condition changes.
- B. **Back Belts.** Are back belts necessary? The research is still conflicted on this. A recent NIOSH study reported that back belts were not an effective measure in preventing back injuries. There are several reasons for this conclusion:
 - 1. **They are not worn properly.** Black belts should be worn low, on the hips. The correct placement is between the navel and tailbone, over the lumbar section of the back. Most back belts are placed here initially but tend to creep up around the waist as the day progresses (especially with women because of their smaller waistline and larger hip dimensions).
 - 2. **Get as close to the student as possible.** Students can be slimy, full of spit, coughing, or drooling but the farther away you are when lifting students, the higher the risk of back injury to the employee. Remember, the farther away...the higher the strain.
 - 3. **Keep the head and shoulders up and don't twist.** The back follows what the head does. If the head is down and the chin is tucked to the chest, you will lose the "curve" and the "power" position for the lift. Keep the head, shoulders, and chin **UP** in order to "lock" the back into place. Twisting when lifting/transferring puts a lot of unnecessary stress on your back.

Safety Rules to Minimize Forward Bending

Forward bending, over time, can contribute to a back injury. When you constantly need to lock wheelchairs, raise or lower footrests, place gait/transfer belts on students, work “hand-over-hand,” get “droppers” off the floor, etc., there are other options to consider. Instead of being forward from the waist with the knees locked, try squatting down, putting one knee on the floor, sitting on a small chair, or using a “golfer’s” lift.

- A. **Working “Hand-Over-Hand.”** When you are required to work with students by placing your hand over their hand, the body needs to be lowered to their level. Avoid the tendency to bend from the waist. Try sitting on a small chair next to the floor and work with the students at their level.
- B. **Getting “Droppers” off the floor.** Be sure that “droppers” are always wearing a gait belt, as this will make them easier to pick up from floor level. Consider sitting on a small chair and lifting them up from behind. For a larger student, get help and use a “two-person” lift.
- C. **Working with those who bite and pull hair.** Children who bite and pull hair do so when you bend forward closing enough for them to reach you. It is important to identify those children early and be on guard when close to them. To reduce your risk of injury, don’t bend forward from the waist to work with them but rather squat down when working near them. This gives you a broader base of support should they pull at you. Also, when holding onto them, be sure **YOU** hold onto them rather than letting them hold onto you. It keeps you in control. If you know they are biters, try not to get too close.

General Physical Conditioning Rules

Just as you need to keep your car in good condition in order to get your body to work, it is just as important to keep your **body** in good condition in order to lift and transfer students safely. Your body is your vehicle to getting paid. If the car breaks down, you can’t get to work...if your body breaks down, you don’t get paid!

- A. **Be a physically active person.** Face it; you have a physically demanding job. As we age, do you feel like you have more energy? Are you as physically active as you were at age 20? The problem is that the older we get the less active we become and our bodies deteriorate with time. Performing some type of aerobic exercise, like walking, biking, or swimming, will increase your energy level and give you more stamina to face the challenges of your job. Mix physical activity into all avenues of your life...take a 15 minute walk during your lunch break, walk the mall on weekends, ride your bike with your kids, or grandkids. Make it a point to get out and exercise three to five times a week, for 15 to 30 minutes each session. If you are over 40 years old, be sure to get a doctor’s clearance before starting any aerobic exercise program.
- B. **Stretch often throughout the day.** Stretching helps the body feel better. Be sure to stretch out before work, as well as after breaks and lunch. Being flexible can help reduce the risk of back injury. When the muscles in the back of your legs or those in your back are tight, it’s harder to squat down to lift properly. When this happens, the body will lean forward from the waist, with the legs locked, and the risk of injury goes up! When you stretch, be sure to **stretch slowly** by holding the stretch 10 to 30 seconds on each body part. Remember to **never bounce** when stretching...just hold the stretch when a slight discomfort is felt. Never stretch to the point of pain! It helps to take some **deep breaths** during the stretch to help the muscles relax.
- C. **Strengthen the body.** We strive to keep our car in top condition so it is dependable and the same goes for the body. Our job demands that we keep our body strong so we are dependable for the children who count on us to be there. Lifting and transferring students is easier and safer when we have strong abdominal (stomach) muscles, back muscles, and thigh muscles. Perform exercises that strengthen these body parts at least three times a week.

Materials Storage Safety Rules

- A. **Store wheelchairs, toys, and bathroom/diaper changing materials in an organized way.** Do not overload shelves and drawers. Do not store materials on top of cabinets. Materials may not be stored within 36" of the ceiling.
- B. **Weight can be a safety hazard.** Heavier items should be stored on the lower shelves, at about chest height or lower.
- C. **Place wheelchairs, cabinets, and shelves away from room exits.** They could fall over and block the exit.
- D. **Keep aisles and passageways free of wheelchairs and materials.** As well as being a trip and fall hazard, they could also impede a quick exit in an emergency.
- E. **Keep the classroom neat.** Everything should have its place in the classroom and keep clutter to a minimum.
- F. **Store chemicals safely.** Keep all chemicals/cleaning supplies out of reach and locked up safely. All chemical/cleaning supply containers must be properly labeled. Store chemicals according to instructions on container labels.