

52. Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing



Introduction

Child care educators and staff are at risk of work related ergonomic injuries particularly back injuries related to lifting and carrying children, bending, reaching, and not using adult size furniture. Stress in child care educators and staff can negatively impact on the quality of child care and interactions with other child care educators, staff, children and their families. Stress and burnout in child care educators and staff is most commonly related to lack of leave and holidays, overwork and conflicts with families over issues such as exclusion of children and other policy issues.

Purpose

Our centre is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all employees. The centre will minimise the risk of back injury in educators and staff and other staff members by applying principles of back care and correct lifting and carrying technique. The centre will establish, promote and maintain mental health and wellbeing of all staff through workplace practices, and encourage educators and staff to take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing. The centre will minimise the risk of educator and staff stress and burnout by working with all employees to negotiate a supportive working environment that will assist them to be healthy and productive members of the workforce.

Goals – What are we going to do?

The centre aims to provide a safe and healthy work environment by:

- Protecting the health and safety of workers and anyone else affected by workplace activities including children, families and visitors.
- Identifying and controlling workplace health and safety risks for all people in the workplace including staff, children, families and visitors.
- To build and maintain a workplace that supports mental health and wellbeing and prevents discrimination (including bullying and harassment) and reduces the stigma around depression and anxiety in the workplace.
- Consulting with employees on matters that affect their health, safety and mental health and wellbeing; and
- Providing adequate training and supervision for all employees to work safely and to facilitate employee's active participation in a range of initiatives that support mental health and wellbeing.
- Increasing employee knowledge and awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues and behaviours

Strategies – How will it be done?

Back Care and Lifting

To minimise the risk of back injury in educators and staff and other staff members and to comply with the Workplace Health and Safety Act and other relevant legislation, the centre will:

- Have adult height sinks and change tables, for adults have adult sized toilets and for children have low self-help toilets and step stools for children.
- Use small chairs with good back support instead of squatting or bending for interaction with children where possible.
- Use an adult chair for feeding infants.
- Have cots with drop sides and moveable steps so that, toddlers can climb into cot where possible.
- Use beds that are lightweight and stackable with washable mattresses.
- Have shelving, filing cabinets, and storage cupboards at suitable height to avoid stretching to reach them.
- Use a trolley for laundry and have the clothesline at a reachable height.
- Use mechanical aids where suitable, ensuring they are not a safety hazard for lifting and moving.
- Have adult sized furniture for adults in offices and where adults do not usually interact with children.
- Where possible, kneel rather than bend down, to avoid neck and back problems.
- Carry children only when necessary, in the correct way – with one arm under the child’s buttocks and your other arm supporting the child’s back. At the same time, hold the child facing you, as close to your body as possible, try to avoid carrying a child on your hip because this may strain your back.
- When lifting awkward loads, be careful to lift with a balanced and comfortable posture.
- Minimise the need to reach above shoulder level and use a stepladder.
- Avoid extended reaching forward, e.g. leaning into low equipment boxes, share the load if the equipment is heavy, long or awkward.
- When lifting babies out of cots, stand close against the cot and raise the child as close as possible to your body, do not stretch over and lift.
- When sliding, pulling or pushing equipment, e.g. benches, or gym mats, if the equipment is not easy to move, ask for help and organise a team lift.
- Use equipment and furniture that can be moved around as safely, easily and comfortable as possible.
- Provide staff with training and information on back care and safe lifting techniques.
- Place lighter items higher on shelves.
- Lift or move furniture using at least two people.
- Where possible, arrange children’s activities/sleep around furniture/equipment to minimise manual handling.
- Minimise lifting children by having steps/foot stools in areas where lifting of children is likely to be needed, such as nappy change room.
- Provide manual handling training for staff, display posters showing correct methods of lifting, and develop strategies for minimising risk such as stickers showing correct methods of lifting.

Stress Management

The centre will be aware that the main causes of stress and burnout in children’s centre staff are:

- Not being able to take holidays or sick leave
- Long working hours, working overnight, on weekends and public holidays
- Inadequate recognition

- Inadequate training
- Lack of breaks and variety of work
- Not being able to contact families in emergencies
- Conflict with families over policy issues especially excluding children when they are ill or have a potentially infectious disease.
- Conflict over administration and non-payment or handling of fees
- Expectations, needs of own family, and dealing with family and personal issues - - increased administration work
- Constant exposure to infectious diseases and other occupational health risks
- Constant exposure to noise
- Responsibility for children's welfare and fear of litigation
- Provide staff with support from the Management and or Nominated Supervisor, about issues relating to – holiday leave, sick leave, not being able to contact families, conflict with families, negotiating with families about adhering to policies and guidelines, administrative workload, and the need of children's centre staff to take leave in personal and family emergencies.
- Assist staff to make arrangements with the Management or Nominated Supervisor about taking regular holidays, some strategies include the child care centre having relief child care staff or the centre manager assisting in finding alternative care if possible.
- Assist staff to make arrangements with the Management or Nominated Supervisor for provision to allow the child care centre staff to take emergency leave for situations such as personal illness in their family or other personal issues, where possible.
- Monitor all child care staff for problems and issues and take positive steps to assist in preventing and managing stress by:
 - Including children's centre staff and other staff in determining changes and making decisions in the management of the service wherever possible.
 - Providing adequate training in all health and safety issues when it is required, especially in the areas that are considered to be major sources of stress for children's centre staff, such as exclusion of sick children, conflict resolution, exposure to infectious diseases and other occupational health risks, caring for sick children and children with chronic health problems, administering medications, and first aid emergencies.
 - Implementing effective communication channels so that children's centre staff and other staff can feel confident in being able to voice their concerns and resolve problems and issues.
 - Assisting children's centre staff in planning workloads and dealing with the impact of caring for children with illness, chronic health problems or other special or developmental needs.
 - Conducting regular reviews of policies, management and communications procedures, and children's centre staff problems and issues.
 - Effectively and fairly dealing with and resolving both children's centre staff and family's complaints and conflicts through a complaints policy and procedure.
 - Providing recognition of staff's efforts and achievements through praise and work and family friendly practices.
 - Establishing communication systems that encourage input from children's centre staff, families, other health professionals, and the community.
- Make opportunities available for Nominated Supervisor and educators and staff for training in personal stress management.
- Employ strategies which help on preventing, recognising and reducing work stress, such as:

- A management system which recognises stress and recognises individuals more likely to be at risk of stress, such as directors and executive staff, and staff who have extra responsibilities.
 - Giving educators and staff more participation in decision making and problem solving in policy making and management of the centre.
 - Make use of employee assistance programs which may be helpful.
- Build a culture of empathy and support in the work place when stressful situations occur.
 - Recognise and acknowledge staff's efforts and achievements.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Under the Workplace Health and Safety Act all workplaces have a duty to protect workers from psychological hazards as well as physical hazards. The best way to do this is by designing work, systems and workplaces to:

- eliminate or minimise risks to psychological health;
 - monitor the health of workers and workplace conditions; and
 - consult with workers.
- All educators and staff have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own mental health and wellbeing, including physical health and take reasonable care to ensure that their actions do not affect the health and safety of other people in the workplace.
 - The centre will assist employees to support and contribute to the centres aim of providing a mentally healthy and supportive environment for all educators and staff.

Roles and Responsibilities

Approved Provider will:

- Ensure the service operates in line with the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations.
- Ensure all centre policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually or as required to ensure compliance with legislative requirements.
- Manage the implementation and review of this policy

Nominated Supervisor will:

- Ensure the centre operates in line with the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations at all times.
- Ensure all educators and staff are aware of this policy and all other relevant policies and procedures.
- Actively support and contribute to the implementation of this policy and its goals.
- Ensure educators and staff are aware of their centres Mental Health First Aider
- Provide supervision, guidance and advice to educators and staff:

- To ensure the adherence to the policy at all times
- On the workplace health and safety and safe manual handling techniques
- When a particular activity aligns with this policy

Educators will:

- Educators and staff will be familiar with and follow the centre policies and procedures and centre standards as outlined in this policy and staff handbook.
- Understand this policy and seek clarification from management when required.
- Support fellow educators and staff in their awareness of this policy.
- Consider this policy while completing work-related duties and at any time while representing the centre.

Related Legislation

- Education and Care Services National Law Act
- Education and Care Services National Regulations - Regulations 168
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011

Links to other policies and documents

- Staff Handbook
- Code of conduct for staff members
- Pregnancy in Early Childhood
- Complaints Handling
- Family Participation and Communication
- Staff Grievance

Links to Education and Care Services National Regulations: 168
Links to National Quality Standards/Elements: 4.2, 7.1

Sources

- ACECQA – www.acecqa.gov.au
- Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations
- ECA Code of Ethics.
- Guide to the National Quality Standard.
- Safe Work Australia
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)
- Staying Healthy in Childcare