

Working at low levels in children's services

What is the problem?

Workers experience musculoskeletal injuries (eg sprains, strains, fractures and soft tissue injuries) from working at low levels in children's services. Working at low levels includes working at floor level, crouching, kneeling or sitting on children's furniture. It is acknowledged that working at low levels may be necessary for engaging with children. Organisations are encouraged to discuss how tasks at low levels are undertaken so the worker's and children's needs are addressed safely.

What are the risks?

Workers may be at risk of injuries from:

- awkward postures due to sitting on children's furniture or the floor
- awkward postures due to crouching or kneeling at floor level
- tripping or falling due to raising or lowering the body to/from low levels
- no adult-sized seating options being available
- working at low levels for long durations.

What are solutions to the problems?

Equipment

- Provide adult sized chairs that are adjustable for seat height, backrest height and tilt. For example:
 - use adult-sized chairs that can be raised and lowered beyond the usual lowering range to ensure workers can sit in a supported posture while engaging with children at eye level
 - check whether castors or glides should be chosen. This depends on the task the chair is required for and whether the chair is permanently located in an area or wheeled in and out as required. As a general principle:
 - chairs with glides should not be considered mobile or carried in and out of areas for use
 - chairs with castors can be moved easily with brake options to prevent movement

- any administrative procedure implemented to control risks (eg the implementation of brakes if required) will rely on appropriate instruction, training and supervision.
- Provide children's chairs that are higher and matched to the age/size of children.
- Provide additional seating options for workers (eg adult-sized chairs, reading chairs or couches).
- Include features in outdoor play areas for workers to sit on as an alternative to squatting, crouching or sitting at ground level.

Systems

- Reduce tasks completed at low levels.
- For tasks completed at low levels:
 - provide a surface to cushion the point of contact between the worker's body and the floor
 - limit the duration the task is conducted for
 - rotate the task to limit worker's exposure to risks.
- Provide workers with information, instruction and supervision on documented work procedures and use of equipment and aids.
- Provide reporting processes so safety issues can be identified and fixed as soon as possible.
- Schedule and record regular inspections and maintenance of all areas of the workplace and equipment.

A Health and Safety Solution

The problem



Workers sitting on children's furniture and the floor to work at low levels.

A solution



Adult sized chair that can be adjusted, raised and lowered to enable the worker to sit in a supported posture while working at low levels.

Further Information

WorkSafe Advisory Service

Toll-free 1800 136 089

Email info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

worksafe.vic.gov.au

Related WorkSafe Health and Safety Solutions

- *Lifting children in/out of cots and highchairs or on/off change tables*
- *Moving equipment in children's services*
- *Storing supplies and equipment in children's services*
- *Using office areas in children's services*
- *Maintaining indoor and outdoor areas in children's services*

Related WorkSafe publications

- *Manual Handling Code of Practice, 2000*
- *Officewise, 2006*

Related publications

- *AS/NZS 4438:1997, Height adjustable swivel chairs*
- *Children's Services Regulations, 2009 (available from legislation.vic.gov.au)*
- *Design guide for Victorian children's services, 2009 (available from education.vic.gov.au)*