

# HELPING PHYSICALLY DEPENDANT CHILDREN SAFELY



*Don't forget that the meeting with the physiotherapist and other support workers the child has been involved with is vital to understanding and assisting the child. This should be done as soon as possible. Many of the behaviors that you might think are unexpected may be normal for that child and will have standard methods already in place. That's really important info for you!*

## **Where should I hold onto them?**

Children who need help need support at their hips, not at their shoulders or anywhere else. If they are walking and need help, it is their hips that they need to raise sufficiently to slide their feet forward. This means that when helping them it's often a case of lifting their hip to allow them to slide their feet forward.

## **How do I do that?**

Kindergarten children will all be a lot smaller than you are and therefore if you are trying to assist them from a standing position, you will be bending over and forced to remain in this bent position while supporting them and moving forward. This is clearly an awkward posture and will result in injury if kept up repeatedly.

You should either sit on a stool or kneel beside the child to assist him/her. You should sit with a straight back and your legs out. A stool is better than a chair because you can access it from any side and you can swivel around on it. The use of a stool on wheels is easiest for assisting walking children but should not be used because of all the risks it poses for other children & adults when it is not being used.

## **Learning how not to lift! Find other ways to move the child.**

An important skill to learn is how not to lift! It is important that we are careful of our backs because injuries can stay with us longer than the inclusion support position we are currently assisting in. We don't have to lift all the time and it is also important to remember that we are trying to get the children to be as independent as possible.

This means thinking through what are the common things which will be done and getting the child to do as much as they can. This will mean such things as letting children push their own chair out rather than pulling it out for them while they are sitting on it. If you pull it out, it is a forceful action while in an awkward posture, likely to cause to cause injury. It is much easier for the child to push their chair out with their legs than it is for you to pull it out.

## **Planning for each session is vital**

It is vital that you are aware of the schedule for each session so that you can plan accordingly. This may be as simple as ensuring that the stool is where you will need it because when you arrive there with the child, you will be supporting them and not able just to 'whip over and grab it from wherever it is'. The child will need all your attention at that point so pre-planning is important. This will also involve talking with the teacher about the best location for the child to be in order to be accessible for you and most easily able to get in and out of the activity area.

*You should also have a pen and a piece of paper in your pocket at all times to note down any concerns or questions about the child for later reference.*

## **What if I have to lift?**

*A simple method to remember how to lift is to think about bending your ankles and your knees and then tighten your tummy muscles. This braces your back muscles when you lift. You should practice this technique when you are doing the shopping and lifting other things at home.*

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## Why do children who 'throw back'?

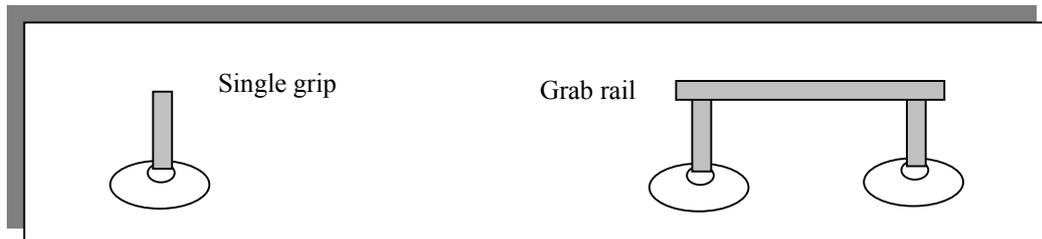
There are two main reasons for this full extension response:

- ▶ Involuntary – this occurs in children who have difficulty when moving from bending over to straightening up to stand or similar. These children move from being bent over directly into a fully outstretched position with head back, which we sometimes call 'throwing back'. They have great difficulty in making this transition slowly and therefore find it hard to go part of the way. This may be found in children with Cerebral Palsy and similar conditions, though it is not exclusive to these children.
- ▶ Behavioural – this behaviour is sometimes a response to not wanting to do something or being frightened by something. Children with autism and similar conditions may exhibit this behaviour though once again it is not confined to them.

## What do I do about 'throwing back'?

The two different causes have different methods of response:

- ▶ Involuntary – the child should hang on to something or have their shoulders pushed forward to keep them leaning forward as they straighten up. The process of gripping something also aids in repressing the involuntary movement. The more control they can develop themselves the better it is for them being able to use this method when you are not there. They can hang onto the edge of the table or something similar or a simple grip can be made as shown below.  
*A grip can easily be made from a 3" suction cap and a short piece of dowel as shown below on the left. A grab rail can be made from 2 of these grips and a cross piece screwed onto the top of both. These are easy to make and can easily be moved to different areas with the child. Some children can pull them off the table, so some experimentation may be necessary.*



- ▶ Behavioural – you need to talk to support people about some of the reasons for this child using this behaviour and think through the occasions when it happens.

### **Two key exercises – in bed at night and in the morning**

1. Lie on your back with your toes pointed up to the ceiling. Extend one leg towards the end of the bed as far as you can without moving your upper body. Pull your leg back up towards you without bending it and keeping your toes pointing to the ceiling. Repeat this with the other leg and do these exercises on each leg ten times.
2. Lie on your back and press your bottom down into the bed. Lift your hips up towards the ceiling. This will rotate your pelvis. Repeat this exercise 10 times.

Don't forget that walking is the best form of exercise. Have a walk after tea or in the morning