

Why shoes should be worn in early learning services.

Guild Insurance is aware that some educators in early learning services choose to not wear shoes when inside the service. While the reasons given for this are understood, there's a concern that the risks associated with this haven't been considered fully. There's a possibility that the decision to not wear shoes is leading some educators into a common risk management trap, where the actions taken to minimise one risk actually create another.

Why is this being done?

Guild has been informed that one of the key reasons some educators choose to not wear shoes inside is due to the concern about dirt being carried inside on the soles of shoes. This is primarily a concern in the baby rooms where there are children crawling on the floor.

Why is not wearing shoes a risk?

Slipping over due to only wearing socks is an obvious risk which could easily occur. We all know that socks aren't going to provide the grip that shoes will. And wearing socks with thin rubbery grip isn't enough.

There are other incidents which can just as easily occur when shoes are being worn, however the potential impact or injury

should these incidents occur when shoes aren't being worn is going to be greater. Some of these incidents are:

- > Items being dropped on feet
- > Furniture or equipment being walked into or tripped over
- > Stepping on toys
- > Needing to move quickly and unexpectedly, such as when a child has been injured or an evacuation is necessary

The risks due to not wearing shoes aren't just going to impact staff; children could also be injured. Imagine if a staff member tripped or slipped over while picking up or carrying a child. The child could easily be dropped or fall to the ground with the staff member and suffer a serious injury.

Workplace policy

It's the responsibility of an employer to ensure the safety of all staff. One of the ways of doing this is to create company policies regarding what's expected. It's therefore recommended that services have a policy advising staff on what shoes they should be wearing to work, based on what's considered suitable and practical for an early learning educator. It would be beneficial to provide specific examples to avoid any confusion.

Assess the risk

When making decisions about whether shoes are going to be worn inside, it's imperative services undertake a risk assessment of all options. As mentioned earlier, too often decisions are made to minimise a potential risk, yet these decisions can create additional and possibly more serious risks. Risks must be carefully considered when being assessed to avoid assumptions being made.

Services need to assess the level of risk to staff and children when staff are wearing the one pair of shoes both inside and outside. With the regular cleaning which occurs in services, and assuming staff wipe their feet before entering the service, is it really a significant risk having staff wear their shoes inside? Services also need to assess the risk, and consider what could go wrong, if shoes are removed inside. Only when risks have been identified and assessed, both in terms of what could occur and the consequences if it did, should decisions be made.

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