



# Trips and falls - they don't just happen to children

When we talk about trips and falls being a common occurrence in early learning centres, many people first think about children tripping and falling. And yes, this unfortunately does happen. However the workers compensation claims managed by Guild Insurance tell us that staff also regularly trip and fall in early learning centres and this often leads to serious injuries.

## What happens?

Our data shows that trips and falls happen in almost any way you could imagine!

We see many cases of staff tripping over the centre furniture, such as when walking around cots. There are also cases of staff falling as they get off furniture such as office chairs. Children's toys, not surprisingly, present a significant trip hazard when left lying around both inside and outside the premises. Staff have also been known to trip over uneven ground surfaces, such as potholes, and fall downstairs.

Ankles are the most likely body part injured, with ankle strains and sprains being a very common injury. However trips and falls can also lead to many other

injuries such as back muscle strains and fractured wrists/arms. When thinking about this range of possible injuries, it's important to think about the common factor with all workplace injuries and that's the impact on both the worker and the workplace. All these injuries may lead to the worker needing time off work which will impact the running of the centre. However, these injuries will also impact the worker personally, not just professionally, as they'll be unable to enjoy their day to day living as they usually do. It's important to remember that workers compensation is there to provide support when an injury occurs, yet it can't take away all the challenges an injury presents.

## Children not always a factor

It would be very easy to think that most times when a staff member trips or falls, a child would be involved somehow. And yes, cases are seen where a staff member trips or falls when a child has unexpectedly run around or into them as well as when a staff member is lifting or carrying a child. However, Guild's claims data suggests about three quarters of incidents where a staff member has tripped or fallen occurs when there's

been no child involved at all. These cases are happening when the staff member is moving around the centre on their own, maybe when cleaning or when supervising from a distance yet not interacting with a child.

## Acknowledge the risk

One of the key steps in any risk mitigation process is to first understand and appreciate the risk.

Trips and falls as an incident category doesn't sound too serious. Unfortunately the name doesn't give an indication of how serious the incidents often are and how serious the resulting injuries can be.

It appears that one of the reasons so many trips and falls occur without the involvement of a child is because the perception of the risk of injury is low. Staff are possibly more mindful of the safety of the children in their care without considering their own safety when undertaking tasks in the workplace.

All staff in early learning centres need to appreciate that a trip or fall can happen very easily to anyone at any time. It's therefore vital to consider how the likelihood of these can be minimised.





### Tips for minimising the likelihood of trips and falls

- > **Lead by example** – some of these incidents happen when staff aren't doing things as they should, such as carrying or lifting a child or heavy furniture when not necessary. It's important for all staff to remember that processes for how things should be done are there for a reason and need to be followed such as bending your knees when lifting or asking a colleague to assist when carrying heavy items. When senior staff don't follow these processes, this sets a poor example for others to follow.
- > **Keep the centre tidy and decluttered** – while it's never easy to keep a space completely tidy when there are children around, it's important to remember that objects such as toys, shoes, pillows etc present a tripping hazard for both staff and children. Children should always be encouraged to pick up after themselves and staff should be on the

constant lookout for potential hazards which need to be moved and put away. Designing a pathway on the centre floor using tape, or perhaps other more creative measures, will encourage items to be moved from these higher traffic areas, reducing the potential for injury.

- > **Centre maintenance** – poor maintenance of a facility increases the likelihood of trips and falls. Floor and ground surfaces that have, for example, potholes, raised carpet edges or cracked paving will pose risks for staff and children. These hazards need to be identified by continually monitoring the premises using workplace inspection templates, which allocate the task to someone within the business. And once identified they should be acted upon as soon as possible, with target dates set where the remediation cannot happen immediately.
- > **Children's toys and furniture** – too often incidents occur when staff

are playing on or using equipment such as toys and furniture which has been designed for children. This isn't appropriate, both from a personal safety perspective but also for the longevity of the equipment.

- > **Wear appropriate footwear** – early learning staff will spend a lot of their time on their feet. For both comfort and safety, it's incredibly important that appropriate footwear is always worn when in the centre.

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