Safe moving and handling in our schools

Dorset County Council

Improving the quality of life for people in Dorset, now and for the future

May 2009
Introduction

The guidance in this booklet has been designed to help schools adopt a flexible and manageable approach to the safe moving and handling of young people with physical disabilities. The aim is to achieve a balance between the duty of care owed to young people and the statutory requirement to ensure health and safety of staff, so far as is reasonably practicable.

A risk assessment management system and framework will be available to enable schools to demonstrate that all measures have been undertaken to fulfil their statutory responsibilities as an employer. This is essential in case a question of litigation arises.

A Manual Handling Adviser is in post to improve the wider approach to the subject in schools, specifically looking at those pupils with special needs. Other key responsibilities include

- Liaising with other professionals in relation to pupils who have manual handling needs.
- Providing guidance and updates on legislation and best practice.
- Providing internal expertise on manual handling issues specifically the movement of pupils in the school environment.

The Manual Handling Adviser works closely with other professionals such as the Educational Psychologist, County Health and Safety Manager, Senior Education Officer and Paediatric Therapist (OT/Physio) to facilitate a joint approach to manual handling issues in schools.

The role does not encompass issues around restraint. If guidance is required on this subject please contact Sue Vernon-Allen (details are provided in the back of this booklet.)

Why is Manual Handling so important?

In January 1993 the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (MHOR ‘92) came into force. This extended the scope of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to reduce the risk of manual handling related injuries to employees.

More than 25% of workplace injuries are associated with manual handling tasks. Most injuries are cumulative, resulting from poor posture or repetitive actions, rather than being attributable to one single injury.

Employees may be at an increased risk of injury when handling pupils with special needs due to the additional issues of involuntary movement, varying levels of dependency and communication difficulties.
How is Manual Handling defined?

Manual Handling Operations are defined as ‘any transporting or supporting of a ‘load’ including

• Lifting
• Putting down/lowering
• Pushing
• Pulling
• Carrying
• Moving

by hand or by bodily force’

Load includes any person, animal or inanimate object.

What does the Manual Handling legislation say?

It is important to remember that current best practice and the MHOR ‘92 do not prohibit manual handling, but rather create a hierarchy of measures for reducing the risks involved.

The requirements of the MHOR ‘92 state that ‘the employer shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, avoid the need for employees to undertake any manual handling operations at work which involve a risk of injury.’

Suitable and sufficient assessments of risks must be put in place to reduce the potential for injury to employees undertaking manual handling tasks with pupils.

‘Reasonably practicable’ is defined in the Regulations as:

‘An employee has satisfied his/her duty if s/he can show that any further preventative steps would be grossly disproportionate to the further benefit that would accrue from their introduction’

The Regulation imposes duties on the employer and the employee to comply equally to a standard of practice that ensures all participants are safe and as risk free from injury as possible.

What are the responsibilities for all of us?

The legislation states that the employer and the employee have a dual responsibility to uphold the requirements of the regulations.

Within schools the key responsibilities are as follows

Of the Head teacher

• Manual handling operations which present a risk of injury are identified.
• Handling operations which present a risk of injury are avoided, so far as is reasonably practicable, by eliminating the need for the load to be moved or by the introduction of relevant equipment.

• Those operations which cannot be avoided are assessed using an ergonomic approach which considers the task, the load, the environment, and individual capability to determine the level of risk. The assessment should be recorded to show that it has taken place and reviewed.

• Measures required to eliminate risk, or reduce it to the lowest level which is reasonably practicable, are identified from the information in the risk assessment and used to implement a safe system of work.

• All new work which might involve manual handling operations is assessed and safe systems of work are implemented before the work commences.

• Regular reviews of assessments are made to ensure that they are still valid but reassessment is carried out immediately if any components of the job change.

• Incidents which result in musculoskeletal injury to staff are recorded, investigated and systems and assessments reviewed in light of the incident. The assessment might also take into account an individual’s pregnancy, recent childbirth or health problem. Care must be taken to assess if an individual’s state of health might significantly increase the risk of injury from manual handling operations.

• Suitable training, supervision and information is provided for all employees engaged in manual handling tasks. Training should be recorded, monitored and reviewed.

Employees

The co-operation of employees is essential in reducing and eliminating the risks from manual handling. Staff should therefore comply with the following

• Safeguard their own health and safety whilst at work, and also that of any person who may be affected by their actions.

• Follow safe systems of work as determined by the result of the risk assessments.
• Use mechanical aids which have been provided for their use and which they have been trained to use. Faults with any equipment should be reported to line management immediately.

• Equipment must be used as per manufacturers instructions.

• Attend training sessions as required and apply the knowledge/skills to daily tasks.

• Report all accidents and incidents which have either caused or could have caused harm or injury.

• Report any difficulties, including ‘near misses’ they have experienced in order that the risk assessment can be reviewed to prevent injury occurring.

• Inform line management if they are unable to perform manual handling duties.

• No-one should perform a manual handling operation which they believe is beyond their physical capability.

• Comply with policy regarding suitable clothing ie footwear and jewellery so as not to injure pupils or themselves when undertaking a manual handling task.

What is the Risk Assessment process?

The legislation requires that we have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place. The Manual Handling Adviser will provide advice and guidance to all schools on risk assessments for children with physical disabilities. All risk assessments should be reviewed and monitored regularly. If they are no longer valid or there has been a significant change in practice they must be updated.

It is important to make this process as pupil centred as possible.

The risk assessments consider the probability of an incident occurring and the severity of the injury or damage that may occur. Undertaking risk assessments and acting upon the recommendations will provide a safer system of work for all concerned.

The steps undertaken to achieve this are

• Look at the hazards

• Decide who might be harmed and how

• Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
There are four key areas to be considered when doing Manual Handling Risk Assessments. These cannot be considered in isolation from each other as they interact and affect each other in turn. Manual handling risk assessments should be available for all staff undertaking manual handling activities.

The four factors are:

- The nature of the TASK
- The LOAD
- The working ENVIRONMENT
- The INDIVIDUAL CAPABILITY

A copy of the risk assessments completed by the Manual Handling Adviser will be kept on file at school and in the pupil's file with the SEN team at County Hall.

Once the Risk Assessment is in place a date will be fixed to review its contents. This monitoring process will look at the following:

- Analysing incident, accident and sickness statistics
- Observing the staff at work
- Consulting with staff
- Examining completed risk assessment forms
- Talking to pupils about the care they receive
- Talking to relatives about the care the pupil receives.

When is it necessary to complete a Risk Assessment form?

**Answer** In any situation where a pupil cannot independently move themselves.

Collaboration between staff carrying out the day to day handling of a pupil is essential to ensure the safest possible means of handling.

The summary of the assessment will have as much detail about the pupil as possible. This will provide an accurate overview as to the pupil's level of dependency.

The tasks identified will be detailed according to the situation or work location.

The Individual Handling Plan will be reviewed regularly. The frequency of re-assessment will depend on the changing nature of the pupil's condition. There may be occasions when this has to be undertaken on a daily basis or as infrequently as
termly where the pupil has a relatively unchanging condition. Each Handling Plan is unique as there will be subtle changes for the pupil and the handler. Once all of these elements have been assessed and the risks identified and recorded, a set of control measures will reduce those identified risks to the lowest possible level.

If the risk cannot be reduced to an acceptable level the problem must be comprehensively documented and the Headteacher notified immediately. Until a solution has been agreed with the Manual Handling Adviser the identified task should not be undertaken.

The control measures may state for example that a pupil has to be transferred from wheelchair to toilet using a transfer board and have two Teaching Assistants in attendance: ie this gives an indication of the level of support and the equipment required in order to reduce the risk of injury.

After completing the assessment a review date will be set in order to reassess the manual handling status of the pupil.

How can the Manual Handling Adviser assist in Schools?

It is mandatory for all staff who undertake moving and handling activities with young people to receive appropriate training.

The Manual Handling Adviser will ensure all moving and handling training needs are addressed for school based staff working with pupils with physical disabilities.

Once the risk assessments are in place they should determine the level and extent of moving and handling training required. They will also identify additional input requirements from specialists such as Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists.

These sessions will support safe systems of work and will be delivered and tailored to the needs of the individuals in the schools. There are a number of ways they can be delivered

• On a one to one basis.
• Revision and development of moving and handling skills through refresher sessions.
• Instruction in the use of specialist equipment – staff must receive this input prior to using any handling equipment.
• Formal talks with staff on the importance of moving and handling. It is important to gain the commitment of staff to implement procedures, which minimise risk, both to the pupil and themselves.

Maintenance of accurate training records will enable schools to demonstrate that all measures have been taken to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. This is essential in case a question of litigation arises.

Regular meetings and training sessions will be arranged with schools to ensure an effective process is in place.

After each meeting held at the school by the Manual Handling Adviser a written record will be produced. This might be in the form of a ‘visit report’ or letter. The report/letter will outline all issues covered and highlight any additional or specialist training requirements. The report/letter will be sent to the Headteacher and a copy will be placed on the pupil’s file in the SEN team at County Hall.

What happens in emergency situations?

The Manual Handling Regulations do not preclude well-intentioned improvisation in an emergency.

What is an ‘emergency’?

Can be defined as ‘a sudden unforeseen event requiring immediate action’

An event should only be considered a true emergency if it is not possible to anticipate it happening. All other foreseeable events must have robust control systems, identified by risk assessments, to ensure the safety of all concerned.

Unforeseeable, emergency or life-threatening situations may occur at any time. Wherever possible, equipment should be used to minimise the risk of injury. However if there is not sufficient time to get the equipment, a manual manoeuvre may be necessary.

If an emergency occurs in an area without suitable equipment or sufficient staff, a risk assessment must be completed after the event and suitable control measures established.
Temporary arrangements

In general, most arrangements for children with physical difficulties are pre-planned. The various professionals that need to be involved are already aware of the child’s details and have regular contact with other personnel to ensure a continuing support programme is in place.

However, a child may have an accident, undergo emergency surgery, or perhaps break a limb. If this occurs it is unlikely that a pre-arranged programme in place. School and other professionals must be advised before a child can return to school; otherwise the Risk Assessment paperwork required as stated in the MHOR ‘92 cannot be completed.

It is important that the discharging hospital and/or the parents advise the school as soon as possible. After gaining access to the child’s details the professionals will make a full assessment of their needs. Children’s Therapy Services will be involved in order to provide therapy and any necessary equipment.

A plan will be implemented to organise the child’s return to school. The child may require adult support at school for a temporary period. The school will have to be informed as to when the child is likely to return so the necessary arrangements can be put in place. School staff may require specialist training to meet any additional needs of the child. It may be necessary to appoint new/temporary staff.

These arrangements can take time to plan and implement. It would be useful if all involved could be realistic about timetables. The Disability Discrimination Act is clear that schools must have the proper support in place for pupils to enable them to attend school.

It will be extremely helpful if parents, hospitals and orthopaedic surgeons are able to provide realistic timescales as to when the child is likely to return to school. This will ensure the schools, Therapy Services and the Manual Handling Adviser are all able to implement a framework for the safety of all concerned.

What if a pupil has an accident at school?

Following an accident or injury, the school must follow the accident reporting procedure immediately. It must be completed as soon as possible with as much detail as possible. The risk assessment for the task or the pupil concerned must be reviewed to
• Ensure the requirements/control measures have been adhered to
• Determine the validity of the assessment and control measures currently in place
• Identify any further measures that can be put in place to prevent further accidents/injuries

Moving and Handling – day to day

We all have occasions when we move and handle objects in our working environment. The following is a list of checkpoints that will ensure safe moving and handling.

Feet
Correct positioning of the feet is the secret of safer handling. Feet should be positioned to form a wide, mobile base.

Knees
Bending knees past 90 degrees becomes less efficient. Furthermore, additional stress is placed on the knee joints, increasing the risk of injury.

Bending then relaxing your knees helps maintain balance and mobility, whilst allowing the best use of the most powerful muscles in the body – the leg and buttock muscles.

Legs
Muscles in the leg and buttocks are strong. If you follow this advice you will use these muscles and maintain a healthy back.

Back
We all understand that we do not want a ‘poker’ straight back whilst undertaking a moving task. Always maintain the backs natural ‘S’ shaped curvature throughout all handling activities. Maintain a comfortable, upright position.

Arms
Correct use of arms is essential when performing a handling technique. The arms dictate the distance the load is held away from the body. The closer to your body the safer the technique becomes. Never take the weight of an object until it is close to your body.

Hands
Ensure you have a secure grip of the load by grasping it firmly, but comfortably with your whole hand. Test the weight prior to moving the object. This will help to assess whether it is within your personal capacity. Where possible when lifting place one hand under the load.
Head
Always think about the activity you are about to perform. Use the position of your head to help promote good posture during any technique. Raising the head at the start of any manoeuvre automatically realigns the spine. Keep your head up and look forwards during a handling manoeuvre.

After you have executed the technique ensure you EVALUATE.

Consider the success of the task you have just performed, so you can rectify any mistakes prior to the task being repeated.

Contact details
Children’s Therapy (East)
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All leaflets can be made available in CD/audio tape, large print, Braille or alternative formats or languages on request. Please contact the SEN Team on 01305 224888 if you require an alternative format or language.

A copy of this booklet also appears on the website:

www.dorsetforyou.com/educ/sen

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