

# ACADEMY OF PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPY

## RESOURCE/FACT SHEET

### Safe Student Lifting and Transfers in the School Setting: A Decision-Making Guide

School-based physical therapists' (PTs') required involvement in students' daily school activities enables students with disabilities to participate in educational activities and access programs and campus facilities. PT's knowledge in ergonomics, biomechanics, safe physical management, lifting, positioning, transfers, and transfer training is essential in school practice, especially for students with physical, multiple and/or complex disabilities. This guide was created as a reference for physical therapists in school systems. Relevant information was obtained from two government agencies: National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) <sup>2</sup> and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) <sup>3</sup>. This guide is not intended to replace state or local educational policies governing lifting procedures. Please contact your administrator regarding any additional state or local policies or procedures that govern your practice.

#### NIOSH Recommendations

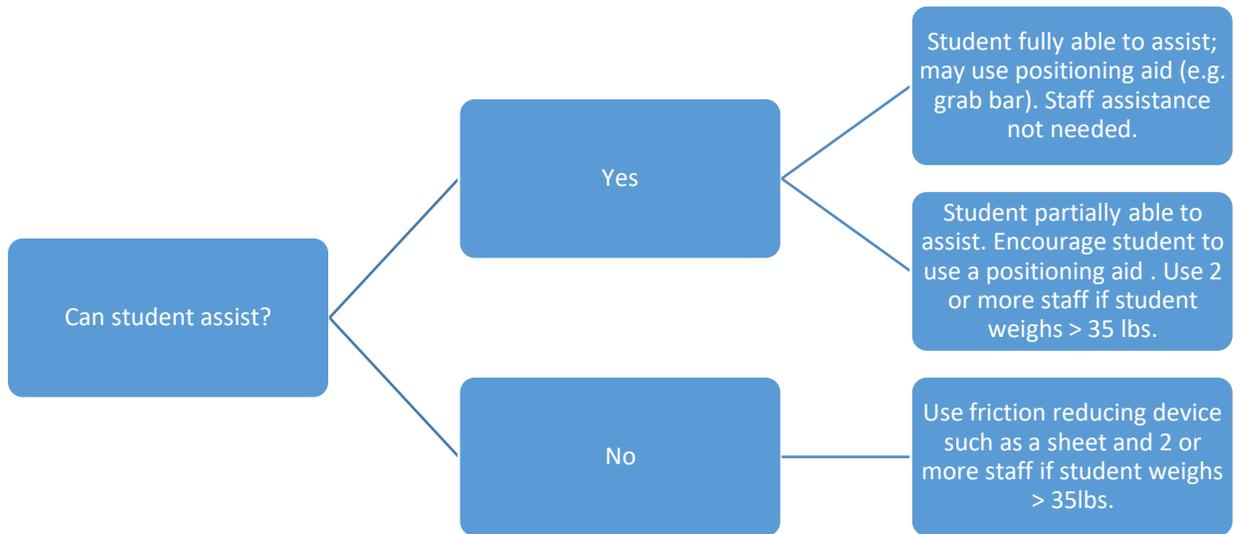
NIOSH recommends that the average worker lift no more than 51 pounds. This is based on ideal conditions of lifting a stable box from ground to waist height. When lifting or transferring people, however, NIOSH recommends a 35 pound limit <sup>4</sup> due to multiple unpredictable variables (i.e. cooperation, ability to participate and understand directions, and muscle tone).

#### Assessment/Considerations when Creating a Lifting/Transfer Plan:

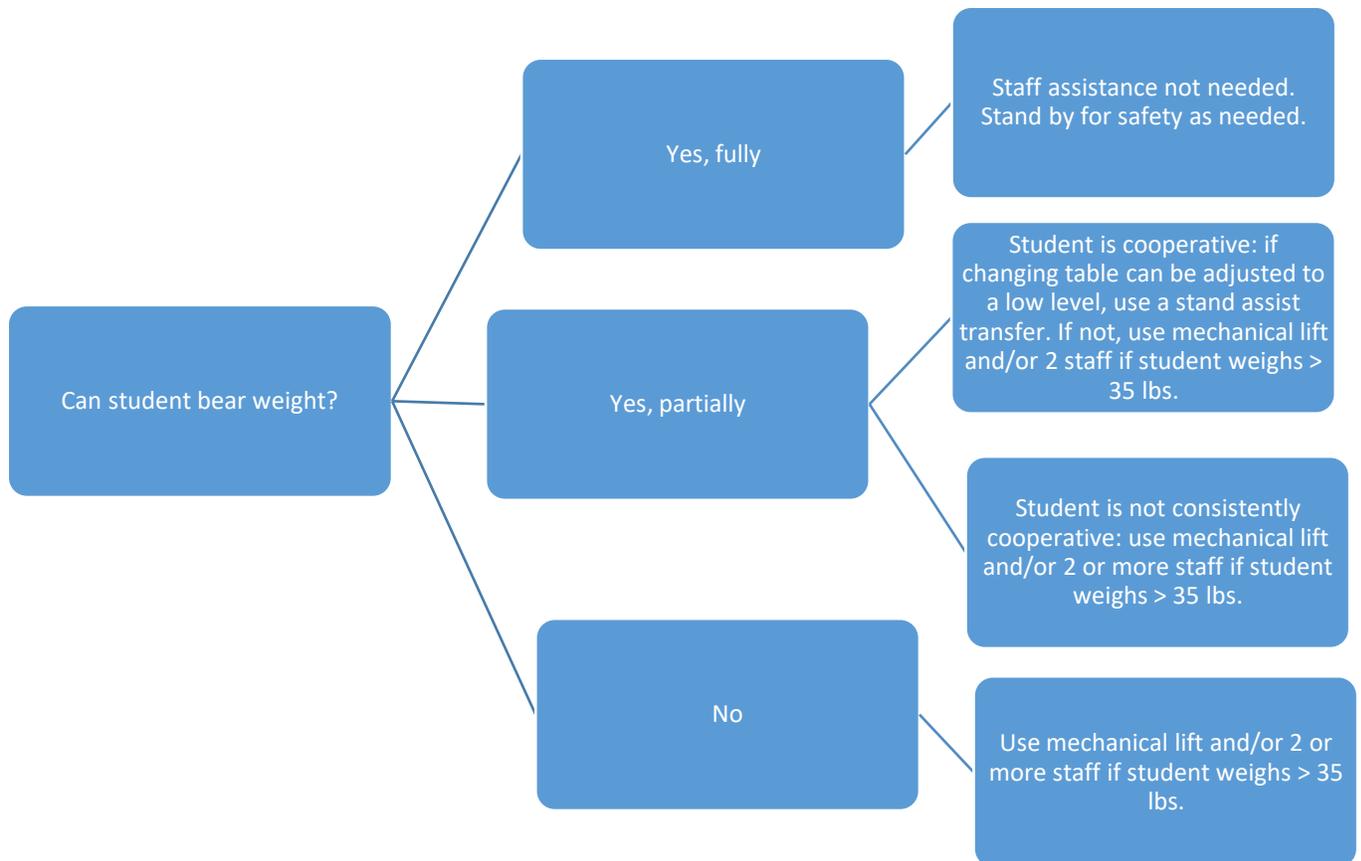
- Environment (available space for transfer/lifts, equipment, how equipment interfaces with other equipment, storage)
- Staff (number available, individual capabilities)
- Budget (availability of mechanical lifts)
- Student characteristics (ability to participate, seizures, muscle tone, height/weight, behavior/cooperation, precautions, involuntary movements, voluntary movements)
- Training (annually and as needed, documentation of training)

**Decision-Making Algorithms:** Please find below four commonly encountered lift/transfer situations in school-based practice with algorithms to assist in safe decision-making <sup>5</sup>.

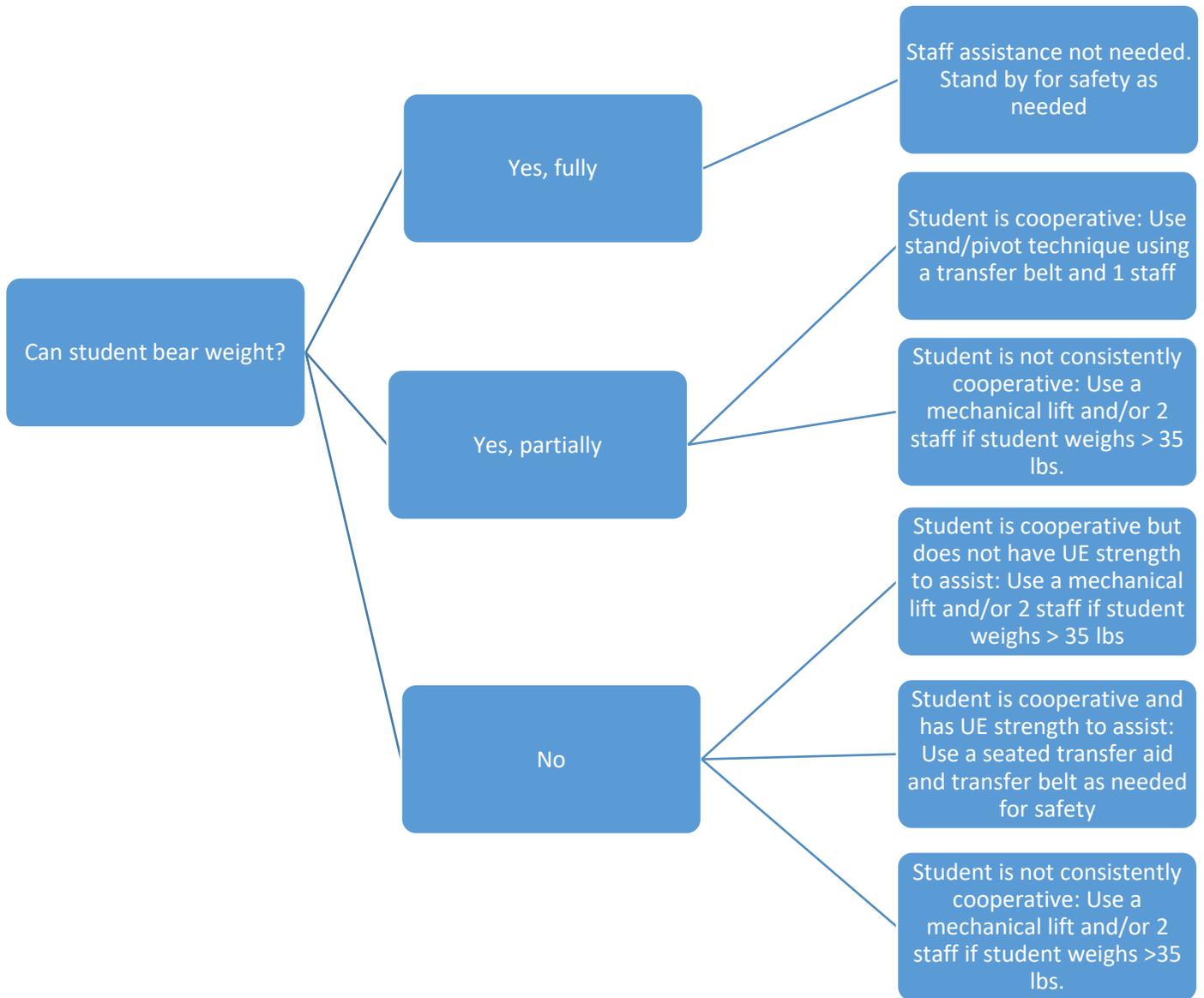
**Figure 1: Repositioning Student on Changing Table: Rolling or Scooting**



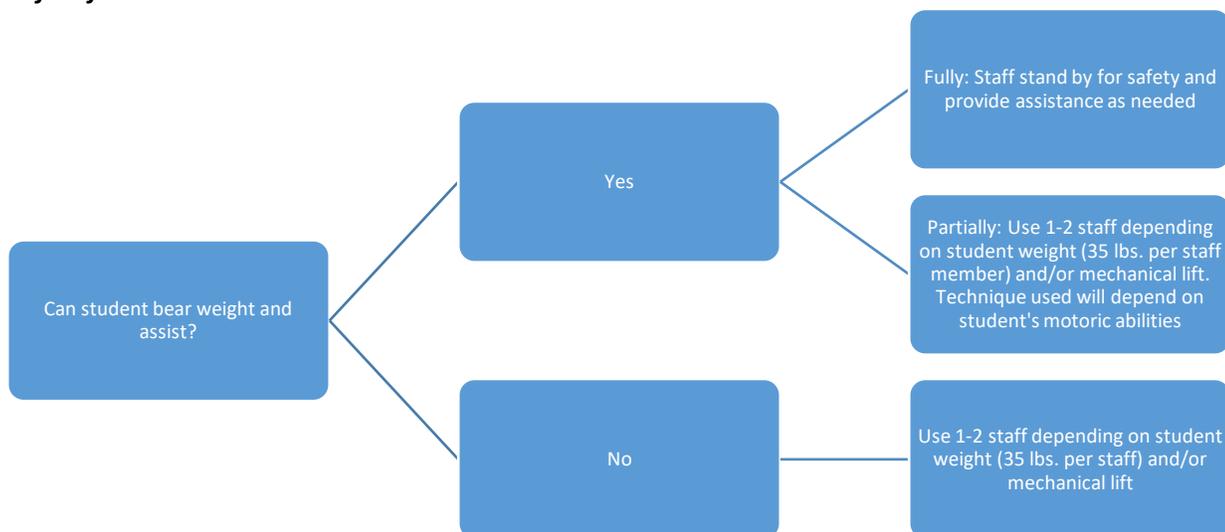
**Figure 2: Transfers To/From a Changing Table**



**Figure 3: Transfers from Chair to Chair or Chair to Toilet**



**Figure 4: Transfers from Floor to Chair and Chair to Floor**



**Tips to Build a “Safe Lifting and Transferring” Process in your Local Education Agency (LEA):**

- Obtain school and/or LEA administrative and legal review of any lift/transfer guidelines and/or resources prior to dissemination to school staff.
- Integrate lift/transfer process into the student’s IEP/504 plan (i.e. student present levels of performance, IEP goals, supplementary aids and services, care plans, and/or assistive technology).
- Partner with administration for support for implementation and to ensure adequate resources.
- Perform environmental assessments (i.e. classroom, bathroom, physical education, community sites).
- Prioritize high risk classes/cases (i.e. children with multiple disabilities or behaviors).
- Consider district budget/budget cycle for ordering of transfer equipment such as mechanical lifts.
- Provide targeted school-staff training in safe lifting/transfers.
- Document staff participation in trainings for compliance and risk management purposes.
- Partner with transfer/lift vendors and schedule trials of their equipment with school staff.
- Become involved early in planning for new buildings and remodeling of current buildings.

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#### OTHER RESOURCES

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