

and the rising up out of a bend. The shoulders hardly need to lift. *It is essential to keep your neck and lower back released throughout this movement; and your spine should not twist or incline as the weight transfers to one side.* (Your teacher can help you perform the movement well.) You should feel a gentle stretch between the shoulder blades and, monitoring the freedom of your neck, depending on the mobility of your shoulders you can gradually extend the height at which the arms circle up as they rise above shoulder level.

### **Lifting and carrying your baby**

To a parent, lifting and carrying young children seems never-ending. When they are very young they like to be carried much of the time; when older they are heavier and, if you have more than one, they'll all want to come on board at the same time!

The Alexander Technique can help you to recover muscle tone in a more efficient and balanced way, to avoid putting undue strain on ligaments that are still soft. First, we shall remind you of the dynamics of lifting, and then the best ways of carrying your baby will be described.

#### *Bending and lifting*

You will find the monkey and lunge, two basic ways of bending that have been discussed in detail on pp. 45–49, invaluable. In the early days, the full squat may be too uncomfortable, particularly if you have had stitches. Later on, if you can't squat comfortably with both heels down, an intermediate way of bending – first lunging and then using the monkey, letting the back heel lift off the floor as you bend – can be especially useful. It gives you good stability – and the possibility of shifting your weight while bending.

Lifting from the floor presents no special problems. The basic principle is always to remind yourself: stop before lifting; release your neck and shoulders and think of your head lifting out of the top of your neck in opposition to your feet, which drive down, your spine lengthening and your legs engaging in the lift last of all (see figs. 138–140).

Lifting your baby in and out of a cot, playpen or car can, however, be very taxing. You will need to minimize the tendency to make top-heavy movements and to use the back as a crane. (There are no hinge joints in the back.) To bend over a cot and playpen, the basic movement is to combine lunge with monkey; with a cot it is usually possible to lower one side, enabling you to bend lower and closer to your baby (fig. 141).

Moving a heavier child in or out of a car seat in cramped conditions is a real hazard for the back. Try to get your front leg as far forward as possible to reduce the forward bending, especially if you have to lean over to the other side of the car – this can be avoided if you get inside the car. Ideally



*Fig. 138*



*Fig. 139*



*Fig. 140*



*Fig. 141* Awkward lifting is made easier by the use of lunge and monkey.

*Figs. 138–40* The head releases out of a free neck, the spine lengthens and the legs engage last of all.