

# Sitting Posture and Learning

*Sitting Posture: The position that someone holds their body when sitting or standing*

## **Is Critical to Learning and Attention**

If children are expected to sit still and pay attention for long periods, then the furniture they use must fit and other options provided when sitting is no longer comfortable.

- Table heights should be at the height of the bottoms of the children's rib cages.
- When they are sitting, shoulders should be relaxed, and forearms should be resting comfortably, with elbows bent at a 90-degree angle, on the tops of desks.
- Chairs should allow feet to sit flatly and firmly on the floor with hips, knees, and ankles bent at 90 degrees.

## **Tips for Helping Children Sit in Chairs**

Sitting still, although it looks easy, is a complex, high-level skill. The ability to extend the body effortlessly against gravity, curb impulses, filter out distractions, and focus on a challenging task for long periods of time depends on a high degree of neurological maturity and physical strength and stability.

If a child's trunk and spine are weak, and he is struggling just to sit up or to sit still, then he is using his mental and physical resources in order to comply with the grownups' demands and not channeling them into learning his lessons.

There are several things we can do in school to help children maintain good posture and alignment, which will support the work of their hands, eyes, ears, and brains for learning:

- *Frequent movement breaks:* Movement fires the nerve in the inner ear that tells the muscles to extend strongly against gravity and the brain to alert itself to the environment.
- Make sure the children's *feet are resting flat on the floor:* This may mean putting a block or step under to raise the floor to them.
- Teach children to make sure that their sitting bones are pointing straight down while they are in their chairs: Do you know where your sitting bones are? Put your hand between yourself and the chair, and feel the large, pointy bone in your pelvis that protrudes downwards.

Unfortunately, many school chairs are designed and constructed so that the chairs are easy to stack and store, rather than with the children's comfort and posture as a first priority. It is actually difficult to sit in these chairs correctly. Sometimes an easy fix to this is to stick a couple of paperback books under the chair's hind legs. This tilts the chair forward so that the pelvis can support the spine.

You can have the children do some simple postural/alerting exercises before they begin doing handwriting by having them stomp their feet on the floor, lift their arms above their heads, out to the sides, push and pull, then shrug their shoulders up as high as they can, pull them back, and drop.

### **Sitting postures on the floor**

Sitting on the floor for extended periods is difficult, which is why children struggle for long periods of time. Sitting in such close proximity to others without furniture to define personal space can feel threatening. Being forced to sit “criss cross applesauce” for more than a few minutes can be painful and promotes bad posture.



*\*Note that his back is rounded making it difficult to maintain for long periods of time.\**

Children often do better sitting on their heels, or lying on their bellies with their elbows propped up, than with their legs crossed in front of them. If you see a child sitting with his legs straight in front of him and his arms propped up behind him, he is expending so much energy just to stay upright that he has little left over to attend to the lesson. He is sitting that way because his back isn't strong enough to hold him up.



*Don't let children W sit*

W sitting (pictured above) is harmful to the joints and impedes the child's development and should be discouraged. Give the child a chair or have him lie on his belly or sit on his heels instead.

### **Tips for helping children sit on the floor**

- Allow students to try different sitting positions on floor (cross-sitting, side-sitting, kneel-sitting).
- Choose a spot with the student facing forward and with good visibility of teacher and activity.
- Use tape or spot marker to indicate student's place on the floor. Instruct student to remain within the marked spot.
- Allow the student to use a stable object as a back support.
- Use other seating options: *foam block floor seat with back support stool bench classroom chair*