

Posture and seating

Good posture and positioning is essential to using our hands well, particularly for activities that require a high level of coordination and concentration, such as writing. A child who has poor posture when sitting at a desk will experience increased effort to carry out any activities that require a high level of dexterity and manipulation. It is for this reason that an appropriate posture should be encouraged from a very early stage, especially for a child that has difficulties with table-top activities. Assessment of furniture in the classroom is recommended, especially for children with special needs. If the furniture is too large or too small for the child, this may have implications on their schoolwork and concentration levels.

Check for:

- Children who look awkward in their chairs.
- Children who have difficulty staying on their chair (ie fidget, move a lot or need to get up all the time).
- Children who are hunched over their desks (ie head too close to their work).

Why is it important?

- If a child has to concentrate on keeping a stable or comfortable position, he will be less able to concentrate on the task in hand.
- He may miss instructions, fidget, appear restless and disruptive.
- Encouraging a good sitting posture through symmetry and midline orientation is desirable for most children to optimise stability, control and functional performance.
- Dexterity and use of the hands will be improved if a good sitting posture is attained.

Ideal posture:

- Hips, knees and ankles at 90 degrees (hips can also be slightly higher than knees, if this is more comfortable and feet are still fully supported on the floor).
- Seat depth to support thighs fully.
- Lower back to touch the backrest of the chair.
- Chair is fully pulled under the desk.
- Forearms are supported on the table.
- Feet supported or flat on the floor.
- Top of the desk should be slightly higher (around 5 cm) than the height of the child's elbow flexed to 90 degrees.
- The child can lean forwards slightly (around 30°) when working.



What to do when a child has poor sitting posture:

- Verbal reminders or prompting:
 - Keep feet flat on the floor
 - Bottom back in chair
 - Back straight
 - Arms forward onto desk
 - Chair pulled into table
- A written checklist left on the desk and referred to at the beginning of an activity.
- Visual reminders or pictures of what good posture should look like. These can be laminated and taped to the desk.

- Check the heights of chairs and tables in your classroom. Does the child look too big/small for the furniture? Could a different sized chair and table from another class be borrowed? Try different sized chairs if you can, to see what is more comfortable for the child.
- Make sure that thigh length is fully supported by the chair seat.
- Raise table on blocks if necessary, so that arms are resting comfortably (5cm above bent elbow). You can have different sized tables in your class so that taller/smaller children can sit together.
- If a chair is too high but appropriate for a table, the child's feet may not reach the floor. If a lower table is not available, a foot-block (any non-slip box) can be created or a foot-rest purchased, to enable feet to rest fully on a surface.
- For a child that gets too close to his work, try an angled sloping desktop to bring the child into a more upright position. This will encourage a better arm position and easier visual focus. The optimum working position appears to be around 20°; however, you can experiment with angles to make the child more comfortable. You can also try a lever-arch folder for older children to rest their work on. A non-slip surface, ie Dycem, may be required to keep paper in place.
- For a child that gets up a lot or fidgets on the chair, a Move n' Sit cushion (air-filled cushion) may assist with promoting a better posture while aiding concentration in class.

When to ask for more help?

If a child has a physical condition that requires specialist seating or if you have concerns regarding a child's posture and require further advice, please contact your local occupational therapy department to ensure appropriate assessment.