

Melinda's Tips 3

Bad posture and what parents can do.

Concerned parents often complain about their children's posture. They often feel something is wrong about the way their child stands, or how they sit doing their homework. Parents naturally want to protect their children, and help them develop good posture, because they don't want them to suffer from back problems either now or in the future.

These days there is much talk about "ergonomics" but how does it relate to your child? Ergonomics is all about adapting our physical environment so that it "fits" us, so that our bodies are comfortable and can work without unreasonable strain, rather than the opposite way around, where we adapt or "fit" ourselves to our furniture and work environment. Ergonomics is rooted in common sense, and with a few tips parents can make a really difference to their child's sitting posture.

Have a look at photo 1; this is an example of a child "fitting" themselves to their desk. Look at the child's back, look at their arm, and look at their neck.... Ahhh! Everything is wrong with this child's desk setup!

How can I help my child sit well?

Start with the following two easy steps.

1. Taking a photo you child from the side sitting at their desk when they are not looking.
2. Look at the photo. Does anything strike you as being wrong or in need of attention?

For a child to sit well with a "straight back", it is vital to get correct relationship between their arms and the desk. This may mean changing or adjusting their chair, or adding a cushion.

Ask your child to relax their shoulders and bend their elbows to 90 degrees; in this position your child's arms should then be able to rest on front the desk. Is their desk is too high, just right or too low?

The most common issue is that a desk to too high. If this is the case, then your child's seat will need to be raised either by adjusting the seat height or adding an appropriate cushion.

If the desk is too low, the desk will need to be raised. Your child may have grown out of their desk, and it is time to change it, or you may be able to adjust the desk by putting some blocks under it's feet. Occasionally when a desk it too low, the chair needs to be lowered, but this is rarely the case.

Remember, your child needs to relax their shoulders, and bend their elbows to 90 degrees. This position will be your guide to making all other changes.

To help avoid wrist and shoulder strain, wrists should ideally rest on the front edge of the desk, with the keyboard accessible from this position. The keyboard should be flat,

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look in case there are little fold up feet at the back you can fold back in. To minimise strain from using a mouse, place it close to the front of the desk, with your child's elbow as near to their waist as possible.

Next - Are your child's feet on the ground? If they are dangling it is impossible for your child to sit with a straight back for any significant period of time, because their back muscles will quickly fatigue. Your child's feet must be on the ground or supported by a footrest. You may want to buy a footrest, but in many homes there is something that you could use to improvise with.

The angle behind your child's knees should be at least 90 degrees. If it is less than this, it is a sign that your child's chair is too low, or their footrest is too high.

Correct monitor height and position help reduce neck and eye strain. The monitor height should be neither too high nor too low. If your child has to tip their neck to look up, the monitor is too high. If they have to tip their neck down the monitor is too low. Your child should be more or less looking straight ahead. It is important that the monitor is not be too close to your child's eyes, as a rough guide, it should be at least an arm's length away from them.

A low monitor is easily adjusted by something under it.

Finally - Take a photo and compare it with the first. Are you happy or are some more tweaks required?

Now look at picture 2.

When a child's desk set up is correct it supports good sitting posture, a child will naturally sit well. They don't need encouragement, it just happens!

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