

## Seating & Positioning

# Occupational Therapy & Physical Therapy Program

## Seating and Positioning to Support Learning

### Grade Level:

All grade levels

### Targeted Skills:

Postural stability

### Materials:

- Chair
- Table, desk, or tray
- Optional: step stool, books, pool noodle, wedge cushion, booster seat, 3-ring binder

## Guidelines:

**The furniture should be the correct size for your child's size.** Please make sure your children are sitting at a desk or table that is properly sized for them (AOTA, 2011). Handwriting expert Katherine Collmer reports that the majority of children are positioned in an ergonomically incorrect manner at school (2016). This impacts their attention, postural control, and stability for fine motor and graphomotor (handwriting & drawing) activities. We know that this is easier said than done at home! Most furniture is probably adult size in the house. If you have a child sized table or desk for your younger children, try to use those when completing tabletop schoolwork. If you need to use the dining room table or an adult sized desk, here are some tips and tricks to modify the environment to better support your child to optimize learning. The picture below shows some general guidelines for chair and table height.

## Modifications to Activity:

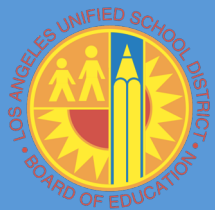
### **Your child may need their seated checked positioning if:**

- They stand up frequently when working (within a short period of time).
- They swing and kick their feet all the time.
- The desk or table rests on their thighs.
- They wrap their ankles around the legs of the chair.
- The top of the table or desk comes up to their armpits.
- Your child can't sit with their back against the back of the chair and their feet on the floor at the same time.

**It's perfectly understandable if the perfect sized furniture isn't available, but before accepting the situation, try to ask these questions:**

1. Is the furniture adjustable? If yes, make appropriate adjustments to size it to your child.
2. Is there another chair or desk available that is a better size for your child?
3. Can I find a way to adjust this furniture to make it work? Adding a stack of books or a step stool may do the trick of getting your child's feet supported. There are also many other ways to adjust furniture so that a child can work comfortably throughout the day.





### Modifications to Activity (continued):



- A pool noodle and a bungee cord – this is a quick fix. Although not ideal, it can give the feet some support and give resistance or “heavy work” to kicking feet.
- Step stool – A simple step stool in the house can provide appropriate support to a small child whose feet don’t reach the floor.

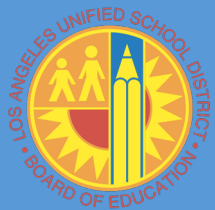


- Use old textbooks, phone books, or reams of paper stacked up and taped together under a child’s feet. If you have shelf liner at home, you can tape some to the bottom to stop them from sliding around the floor under your child’s feet. A few inches can make a big difference in helping a child get comfortable.

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1. A foam kick board and pool noodle- this is a creative therapist hack that is inexpensive with materials from the Dollar Store or items around the house. Cut the pool noodle to the height of the backing, then use packing tape to secure the two-pool noodle “posts”. Put your foam kick board in front of the noodles – you just made that chair about 4 inches smaller. This will provide better back support for a small child. You can also use a firm pillow and place it behind your child’s back.



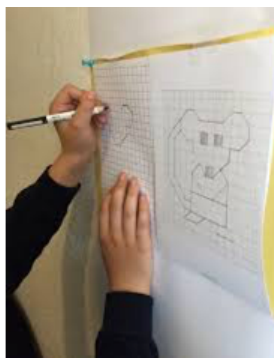
2. A wedge cushion is a classic therapist trick that is often used for kids who are “sensory seeking”, but it can also be helpful when a chair is a bit too big. It can support a child as they sit, allowing their arms to reach the desk comfortably. If you don’t have one of these cushions, some other alternatives could be: a booster seat that you may have for the car or dining table for a smaller child, or you can turn a 3-ring binder into a wedge cushion. Make sure that it is firm enough to support your child’s weight; fill it with paper to the perfect size!

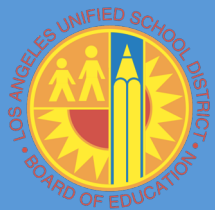


### Modifications to Activity (continued):

#### **Rotate Positions - Other Options in the Home**

1. Work/Play in Standing: while doing different activities at home your child may benefit from breaks from sitting to work in standing. Working in standing gives your child a movement opportunity as well as provides strengthening to different muscle groups.
  - a. Your child may be able to work comfortably in standing at your kitchen table. Or you can place what they are working on (ex. Laptop, tablet, paper, workbook) on a raised surface such as a pile of books and let them stand to work at the table they had been sitting at. When letting your child work in standing the work surface should be at their elbow height with forearms able to rest flat on the surface. A laptop screen should ideally be placed at eye level and at the distance from the child equal to the size of the screen.
  - b. Your child may also enjoy a break to work on a vertical surface such as a wall, window or sliding glass door. This surface is often fun for painting and coloring tasks. Click [here](#) for 10 ways to use a window for play!
  - c. If your child has adapted equipment at home that that been provided by their medical providers, you can position them in their stander or gait trainer to do similar activities. They can stand and use the tray on their equipment to participate in school or family activities. Use equipment only if you are familiar with it and have been trained by your medical provider; supervise your child at all times when in adapted equipment.

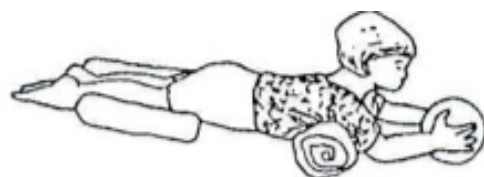




### Modifications to Activity (continued):

2. Work/Play on the Floor: The floor provides your child an opportunity to work other muscle groups while on their tummy (in prone position) or in alternate seated positions. A clipboard or other hard surface may be used while participating in coloring or gluing tasks on the floor and the floor is a good place for building games such as using legos, blocks, or puzzles in between tabletop tasks. Click [here](#) for 14 prone position activities for kids!

If your child needs help with positioning on the floor, you can prop them in side-lying using pillows so that they can reach for toys placed in front of them without having to lift their arm against gravity. You can also help place them on their tummy, using a pillow or rolled up towel to place under their chest and position them in a “propped on forearms” position to get weight bearing through their arms and shoulders, and to work on lifting their head against gravity. \*\*Make sure that you are next to your child at all times in this position to make sure that they are able to keep their head up off the ground\*\*



### How to Incorporate into Family Routine:

You can use these tips and tricks for all seating and positioning needs throughout the day, not just when participating in distance learning activities for school. These adjustments will be helpful for all seating and positioning needs at home during family activities such as dinner time, family activities such as board games, puzzles, or drawing.

### Additional Parent Resources:

- [1. The Crucial Importance of Positioning in the Classroom](#)
- [2. Posture in the Classroom](#)
- [3. Learning without Pains: How Sitting Affects Learning](#)
- [4. UC Davis Posture Perfect](#)
- [5. Guide to Proper Sitting & Standing Desk Ergonomics](#)
- [6. 10 Ways to Use a Window for Play](#)
- [7. Prone Position - 14 Activities for Kids](#)
- [8. Wheelchair Positioning for the Classroom](#)
- [9. The Impact of Positioning in the Classroom Setting](#)
- [10. Positioning the Child with Cerebral Palsy](#)