



# Don't Sit Like a W!



Playing is Learning!

"Still sitting between his legs. Attempt to break his sitting habits." This notation on a student's medical record jumped out at me. I knew just what the doctor meant. Many of my kindergartners sat between their legs, their knees turned in and their feet out to their sides, looking for all the world like a gang of Ws. Adults don't do it unless they're double jointed. But young children do it all the time.

Often times when children sit on the floor, whether in the classroom or watching T.V. at home or doing any other stationary activity, they use this W position. Children sit like Ws because it is an easy position to assume and maintain. Sitting like a W gives the child a broad base of support and allows them free use of their hands at the same time. However, it may also be harmful to their health.

When youngsters sit this way, at least four areas of the body may be adversely affected. The hips have too much stress put on them; the thighs twist inward in an unnatural position; the kneecaps, which should be facing frontward, twist inward; and the feet are also turned in. Children who make a habit of sitting in the W position may walk and run with their knees and toes turning inward and their feet kicking out at their sides. This gait gets a lot of laughs for Jerry Lewis in the movies, but it's hardly recommended for growing boys and girls.

Bad enough, but even worse is the fact that W-sitting may bring about serious illness. Dr. David E. Larson, an orthopedic surgeon in Alexandria, Minn., suggests that sitting between the legs may create a worsening condition which could eventually lead to loose kneecaps or early hip arthritis.

The need for a new and strong emphasis in the schools on desirable sitting habits is stressed in Leslie W. Irwin's book, *The Curriculum In Health and Physical Education* (Wm. G. Brown Co.) This means, of course, that teachers must play an active role in helping children establish correct sitting postures. The need for a new and strong emphasis in the schools on desirable sitting habits is stressed in Leslie W. Irwin's book, *The Curriculum In Health and Physical Education* (Wm. G. Brown Co.) Here are some suggested activities you can try:

1. Begin by carefully observing the children in your classroom. Note (mentally or on paper) which youngsters sit like Ws.
2. Talk to the kids about why they should not sit this way. Many of them don't know what good sitting posture is, or even that it's important.
3. Tell the children that they can sit any way- so long as their feet are in front of them. Be especially insistent that no child sit on his legs either directly underneath him or tucked out to his sides.
4. Children love to teach each other, so encourage them to do just that. When they see someone sitting like a W, they can give a friendly reminder: "You're sitting like a W!"
5. Inform parents about the best floor sitting positions. Let them know why you're concerned and how important this subject is to their child's health.
6. Encourage children to sit on furniture when they are in school or at home. This will help them learn how to position their legs properly.

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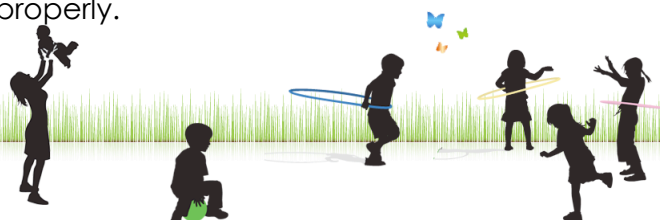
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7. Incorporate developmental gross motor activities into your ongoing program. Amy Mildram, a pediatric physical therapist, suggests the following activities to help stimulate normal gross development:

**Line-Walking.** Put a line of masking tape on the floor -or use the straight edge of a rug, a length of rope or a walking board. The pupils' objective is to try walking forward and backward as they keep their feet on the line. To lend some excitement and creativity to this activity, pretend that the line is a bridge over dangerous water (or whatever else you and the kids can dream up).

**Fly Like a Bird.** As the children lie flat on their stomachs, they pick up their heads, extend their arms out to their sides and lift their legs up and then out straight. (The children's body weight will be centered on their stomachs.)

**Jumping.** Pupils jump with their feet together and toes pointed. This is a good group activity that can be done with a musical accompaniment, like "Pop Goes the Weasel" or another exciting familiar song.

The floor is a safe, readily available place for small children to sit and play. Continue encouraging the use of unrestricted boundaries and the open space of floor areas. But, as you encourage use of the floor, you must teach youngsters correct ways to sit with their feet in front of them! And, just as important, remind them over and over.

*By Pat Timberlake (original publication unknown)*

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