

Preschool Field Officer Service

Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



'W' Sitting

What is 'W' Sitting?

"W-sitting" is a position that is often used by children when seated on the floor or on the ground. In this position, a child sits on their bottom, with knees bent, feet tucked under, and legs splayed out to each side in a 'W' shape. Because this position is so common, most adults do not realize that use of this position can have negative implications on children's growth and development. It can become a concern when children use 'W' sitting often when seated on the floor or the ground.



What is wrong with 'W' Sitting?

- It places abnormal stress on a child's hips and knees
- May impact on the alignment of the lower leg to the thigh and can be associated with leg pain, especially knee pain, often at night.
- May impact on a child's balance and their ability to cross the midline
- Long term may lead to hip and leg muscles becoming tight and shortened; which can result in a child walking 'pigeon toe'
- May delay the development of perfecting the child's motor skills
- Long term it can lead to dislocation of the hips
- Children who W-sit may also develop postural problems, such as a sway back – the spine curves too far inward – and this affects balance and coordination.

Why do children choose to 'W' Sit?

'W' sitting provides children with a wider base of support and a lower centre of gravity – this increases their stability. Thereby, it is easier for them to keep their balance while concentrating on what they are doing.

What can I do to help?

- The most common alternate position is with feet crossed and knees apart. “Criss-cross applesauce” is a fun term you can use to prompt your child to change their sitting position
- Model the preferred way to sit
- Be consistent, and use a visual to reinforce the preferred way to sit.
- Side-sitting is another alternative if sitting with knees out is too difficult. In side-sitting, knees are bent, weight is shifted to one hip, and both feet are out to the same side. This takes away stress from the hip joint structures, allowing for easy transitions in and out of sitting.
- Long sitting with feet forward and back supported is a great way to stretch out those hamstrings and keep hip/knee joints in neutral.
- Another way to sit and let gravity help stretch the muscles is to sit on the floor with the soles of the feet together, knees bent out to the side.
- If a child has a hard time sitting and playing, consider letting them kneel with their feet tucked together under their bottom. Monitor that the child doesn’t slowly shift back into the W-shape, kneeling is a great position to strength their hip and core muscles.
- Finally, squatting or sitting on a low chair will also help keep a child from W-sitting during play.
- Provide lots of opportunities for activities that stimulate and strengthen muscle tone in the legs, strengthen back muscles and help align the hips by Integrating activities through play – Obstacle courses and climbing frames require children to use hands and feet, feet and lower body, hands and upper body, balance, and to use equipment in multiple ways. These activities help your child build their core strength, practice crossing the mid-line and improve balance
- Exercise the hip joints by singing action songs such as ‘Row, Row, Row your Boat’
- Crawling – play games where your child can get down on her hands and knees – tunnels etc.

Where should I go for help?

If you notice that ‘W’ sitting is the only position your child can sit on the floor; or if you have concerns with the way your child walks, please see a paediatric therapist; an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. It is not necessary to get a referral from your GP; however, the GP or your Maternal and Child Health Nurse are the first point of call if you have concerns about your child’s health and development. The GP will be able to advise you on the best person to see for your child.

For more information:

http://www.nevdgp.org.au/info/std_misc/Gait_hcs.htm

<http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/W-Sitting-handout.pdf>

Image from: <http://www.davidwolfe.com/kids-w-sitting-position/>