**What is Good Posture?**

Good posture refers to the proper alignment of head, shoulders, trunk, hips and feet. Proper posture helps avoid muscle strain and injury. The body should be relaxed but straight, responding to gravity forces.

**Check list for Good Standing Posture**

- Chin is tucked and ears are over the shoulders.
- Head is erect and facing forward, not tilted to one side or the other.
- Shoulders are back and down slightly, even and relaxed.
- Abdominal muscles are tightened and buttocks are tucked in.
- Knees are neither locked nor bent.
- Feet are flat on the floor, not on tiptoes.

**What Does Posture Have to Do With Education?**

Problems with comfort and fatigue will arise in all areas of school life as a result of poor posture. This impacts the ability of the student to be available for learning.

**In the Classroom:**

- Floor sitting – Poor posture will impact attending. Expect students to be able to sit for 10 – 15 minutes maximum. (How long are students expected to sit on the floor during assemblies or in classrooms?)
- Desk – Poor posture impacts fine motor, writing (speed, efficiency, and legibility), and attending. The length of time students can be expected to work at desks is dependent on the age of the student.

**Sitting Guidelines:**

- EC – 2nd grade = 15-20 minutes,
- 3rd – 5th grade = up to 30 minutes
- 6th – 12 grade = 50 minutes with a movement break (How long are students sitting for standardized testing or other activities?)

**In Special Classes:**

- Art – Poor posture will impact the use of both hands (control of materials, use of tools), and will challenge sitting balance when students are on stools with no back support.
- Music – Poor posture will impact breath support, and the ability to manage instruments. (Are folding chairs, sized for adults, being used for students?)
- Physical Education – Poor posture will impact the force of throwing/kicking and the efficiency of movement. It will also impact persistence and endurance.
- Computer – Poor posture will impact the speed and accuracy of keyboarding.

**In the Lunchroom:**

Poor posture will impact the use of both hands, the control of utensils, and will challenge the student’s sitting balance on benches with no back support.

**Check list for Good Sitting Posture**

- Back is supported by the chair. The chair should not compress behind the knee.
- Feet are firmly on a surface for support. Knees are flexed at a 90degree angle.
- Head is balanced on the neck (not tilted back or too far forwards).
- Arms are close to the body and relaxed.

**What Can Teachers Do About Student's Posture?**

If a student is showing signs of having difficulty with activities, look at his/her classroom sitting posture, the school furniture, and the ergonomics (structuring the situation so body mechanics are the most efficient, safe and comfortable).

- **How does the chair fit the student?**
  - Optimal sitting posture maximizes stability and allows the student to achieve his/her best performance during fine motor activities. To get optimal sitting posture, fit the desk and chair height to the student.
  - How is the seat depth?
  - Are the feet flat on the floor?
  - Allowing the feet to dangle may place undue strain on the back, fail to provide stability, and may reduce blood circulation to the legs. A small footrest may be used for support if the child's feet do not reach the floor. This can be fabricated out of a variety of materials (such as old phone books and duct tape) and attached to the legs of the chair if necessary.

- **How does the desk fit the student?**
  - Adjust the desk or table height relative to the child's seat height and arm position.
  - Desk height should be at slightly above bent elbow level with 2-3"clearance beneath for legs.
  - Shoulders should be relaxed and not elevated when elbows are resting on surface.

- **Options for enhancing posture:**
  - If a child continues to have difficulty maintaining upright posture for work completion, given appropriate fit of desk height and chair size,
    - Provide movement breaks throughout the day to reduce muscle fatigue.
    - Use a wedged seat (slanted down toward knees) to facilitate an upright back position.
    - Use a pillow or lumbar support placed in the chair's back.
    - Allow positioning alternatives to chair/desk, such as standing, kneeling, lying on stomach, sitting on a large gymnastic ball, or other movable surfaces that allow weight shift (such as “Move n Sit”, “Sit Fit”).
Options for Positioning materials:

- Place paper in the midline, parallel to the child’s writing arm.
- Tilt the paper so the upper right corner is higher for right handed children, and tilt so the left upper hand corner is higher for left handed children. This angle will enable a straighter wrist alignment.
- Encourage the child to stabilize the paper with his/her non-dominant hand.
- Use removable tape to keep the paper in place if the child is unable to stabilize it for himself or herself.
- Provide a slanted writing surface. This may improve a child's posture and is especially helpful for those with vision or visual perceptual difficulties. Use a 3 ring binder (slanted down toward student). Tape or clip the paper to the binder as needed to create a slight angle.

Considerations for Computers:
The computer screen should be positioned so that the first line of text is just below eye level when the child is in a good sitting position.
- The head and neck should not be tilted or forward.
- Risks of postural problems associated with computer use depend upon the length of time a child uses the computer without taking a break. There are software programs designed to give on-screen alerts to “take a break”.

Considerations for Backpacks:
Heavy backpacks cause pain, aches, and fatigue. Students with scoliosis should never carry heavy loads on their backs and shoulders. Heavy backpacks cause a tendency for the body to want to fall backward. Resisting this force takes extra energy and can lead to adverse symptoms.
- Have students keep backpacks light. If the load forces the wearer to lean forward, it is overloaded. No one should carry more than 25 pounds on their back.

Recommended weight limits set forth by American Chiropractic Association, American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person's weight/Backpack</th>
<th>Backpack weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 lbs</td>
<td>5 lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-65 lbs</td>
<td>10 lbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>100 lbs</td>
<td>15 lbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>125 lbs</td>
<td>18 lbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>150 lbs</td>
<td>20 lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200+ lbs</td>
<td>25 lbs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Select backpacks that have wide, padded straps and several compartments that distribute the load.
- Have students wear both shoulder straps. When worn properly, backpacks are easier on backs than bags carried on 1 shoulder.
- Position the backpack so that it hangs just below the shoulders and rests on hips and pelvis.

Strategies to consider to lighten the load:
- Provide lockers.
- Provide two sets of textbooks for those who have trouble carrying additional weight.
- Foreshadow which books will be needed and which ones can be left at home.
- Instruct children to put heavy bags down when waiting or standing in line.

For more information on this topic, contact the principal, the building physical and/or occupational therapist, and/or refer to the following resources:
- Seating for Task Performance
- Barrington School District 220 (Illinois) “Pre-OT/PT Referral Interventions for Classroom Difficulties”
- Backpack Safety (www.backpacksafe.com)

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WHAT IS POSTURE?

Posture is the body’s automatic mechanism for holding itself up against gravity in the most efficient manner. An inability to achieve or maintain postures may be an indication of:
- muscle imbalances
- skeletal problems
- arousal/attention issues
- sensory issues

WHY DO WE NEED POSTURE?

Posture prepares the body to move and to respond to movements.