

# learning links

Helping Kids Learn

[www.learninglinks.org.au](http://www.learninglinks.org.au)

Information Sheet 25



## Does your child W-sit?

By Margaret Stroh, Physiotherapist, Early Childhood Services

**“W-sit” is a term to describe a sitting position in which a child sits on the floor with their bottom between bent legs and their legs rotated so they are facing away from their body. Their legs form a “W” shape on the floor.**

This position of choice is usually adopted during the child’s transition from crawling to sitting. It is adopted primarily because having a wide base gives the child stability. The result is that the child’s trunk muscles are denied valuable practice in adjusting to lateral (sideways) weight shifts.

Children with low muscle tone and/or hyper-mobile joints often adopt this posture for floor sitting. The ligaments around the hips are lax, allowing a greater than normal range of movement and less joint stability.

For these children, sitting with a wide base requires less effort to stay upright. To gain a wider base, some children may opt for the legs to rotate outwards and spread wide apart.

Children who have difficulty with balance are very often those children who W-sit or sit with an extremely wide base. One explanation is that they have not developed trunk rotation (twisting) or trunk side-flexion (bending to the side) to the same extent as their peers.

The use of trunk muscles is integral to efficient equilibrium reactions.

This term refers to the way our body moves or reacts to keep us upright when we are suddenly put off balance such as by stepping on an unstable surface or being pushed. The more we develop these reactions, the better our balance will be.

W-sitting is discouraged because of the long-term effect it could have on the muscles and joints of the back, hips, knees and feet.

Children who W-sit may also develop a posture commonly known as sway back and have a tendency to walk and stand with feet turned inwards. This is usually accompanied by tight hamstrings and lower back muscles.



**Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.**

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

**Early Childhood Services** for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

**School Age Services** for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

**Family Services** helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

**Professional Development** for teachers and health professionals.

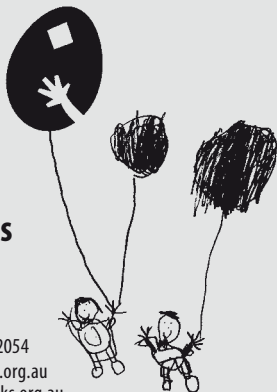
Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

**Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Peshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.**

## Learning Links

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## What to do

To avoid W-sitting, sit with your child on the floor and model a different way of sitting.

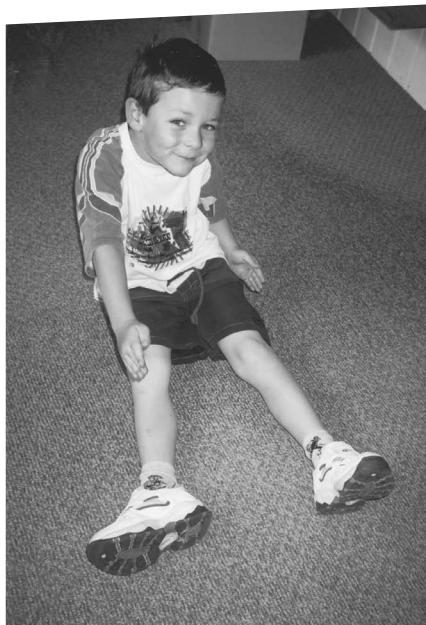
You can suggest sitting cross-legged or on their side with their legs both out to the one-side. If your child prefers side sitting, it is a good idea to make sure it isn't always on the same side.

If you are unsuccessful in correcting this habit, then encourage sitting on a low stool or a cushion, rather than W-sitting on the floor.



Side-sitting

You can also have a regular exercise session in which you do muscle stretching and strengthening activities or if this is not appropriate, then try to incorporate some of the following suggested activities into their play.



Bottom-walking

## Target Activities that use trunk muscles

1. Lying on their back, the child bends their knees towards their chest, slowly rotating their legs from side to side, not letting them touch the floor.



2. Without using their arms, the child moves from side sitting up onto their knees then sits to the other side. Repeat going the opposite way.
3. Sit the child on a large ball. Ask them to lift one foot off the ground and then the other. The child can use their arms for balance.
4. Bottom-walking – ask your child to sit with their legs straight out in front, then lift one side of their bottom off the floor and forward, followed by the other. You can do this as a way to go to the bathroom at bath time. If you have a hallway, this is a great place for bottom-walking races!



## Hamstrings

The hamstring muscle is attached to the pelvis and runs down the back of the thigh inserting into the bone of the lower leg. When contracted, the action of the hamstrings is to move the leg backwards and to bend the knee. The opposite of this action will stretch the hamstring muscle. Hence when we sit on the floor with our legs out in front we have our hamstrings in a stretched position. If it is uncomfortable to do this without bending knees or slumping the back then the hamstrings are considered to be too tight.

Another exercise is to stand and walk your fingers down your body all the way to your toes, making sure that you don't bend your knees. Can you walk your hands out in front? Now keep your hands on the floor and walk your feet up to them.



## Hip & shoulder stabilisation

Ask your child to kneel on the floor on hands and knees with their hips and shoulders at 90° to their trunk. Ask them to lift one leg and balance on the remaining leg and two arms. Now ask them to lift the opposite arm. Then ask your child to repeat this with alternate sides. (You might have to demonstrate this one!)



Another exercise is to try walking on all fours like a dinosaur might by lifting both arm and leg from one side forward, then do the same with the other side.



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### Early Childhood Services

– all enquiries to Head Office

### School Age Services

– contact your local branch

### Family Services

– contact your local branch

### All other enquiries

– Head Office

### Head Office

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