

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS - POSTURE

A child with a physical disability is often on the caseload of the local therapy services. An occupational therapist can support with fine motor skills and activities for daily living. Physiotherapists can offer support for gross motor skills and mobility.

The importance of correct seating cannot be underestimated, especially for pupils who experience difficulties with balance or stability due to motor impairment. Most children with physical disabilities need to be encouraged to sit up straight with their feet flat on the floor. Some children will benefit from placing their feet on a footrest, which can be made using a pile of catalogues, upturned plastic tray or a sturdy box.



A physiotherapist may recommend specialist seating or a wheelchair. Usually the wheelchair will have a footplate which offers support for the child's legs. It is useful to look at table heights to check the child's chair will fit under the table; allowing him/her to sit comfortably without the table top pressing on their legs.

Chairs - should provide a stable base for the bottom and support the back. A child's legs should form a right angle with the trunk at the hips - helping to provide stability and fixate the shoulders and the arms. This is important for writing and any fine motor task involving the use of hands and arms, e.g. feeding, lacing, threading, mark making, writing.



Tables - should be at the correct height for the child, i.e. elbows should be at or slightly below the height of the table and there should be adequate knee space. A child who is very small or tall may need different furniture from their peers. A variety of combinations may need to be tried - a cushion could be used as a temporary solution to raise the height of the child.

Tabletops - should offer a smooth flat surface. A child with a physical disability may have reduced co-ordination skills requiring plenty of space on the tabletop for play materials or equipment. A Dycem mat placed flat on the table will help stabilised books or toys. Sometimes an occupational therapist will recommend an angled surface for mark-making, e.g. a smooth surfaced A4 file or commercially produced writing board.

Table top toys or mark-making tools need to be positioned within reach of the child. Sometimes an occupational therapist will recommend tasks to improve fine motor skills, which can be included in the child's daily activities. A physiotherapist may suggest the child will benefit from reaching out for toys, etc as this will provide an exercise for the arm muscles.

