

Sitting Still: An Important Skill

School will be starting before we know it, and children will be expected to make the transition from periods of greater activity to more time spent sitting still. Whether your child will be making this transition this year or not, it is never too late to help children develop the ability to sit still for a reasonable length of time.

Why sitting still is so important

Many of children's learning activities emphasize cognitive or small motor skills. It is easier to focus one's thinking and muscles when seated or otherwise still. Kids who have trouble sitting still may exhibit poor attention, decreased learning, difficulty finishing tasks and assignments on time, and difficulty finishing every day activities, such as eating a meal. Fidgety kids can also be distracting and irritating to those around them, keeping others from focusing and learning.¹

What if sitting still is too difficult?

All children require some amount of physical activity—some more than others. The keys to helping children sit still are to first, make sure they are getting enough physical activity in general; second, teach them about situations where sitting is expected; and third, have some strategies to help them sit successfully when required.

The importance of physical activity

Fidgeting is sometimes the result of weak muscles. Children need a strong core for support and postural stability. Without them, they may fidget in an effort to maintain an upright position despite tired muscles. Physical activity can help them develop the trunk muscles they need.¹

Physical activity also allows children to expend some of the tremendous amount of energy they have.

Physical play, especially with an adult, is also im-

portant to the social-emotional development of children. Physical play fills up a child's "reassurance tank". Roughhousing, horse rides, chase games, hide-and-seek—any game in which the child is a guaranteed winner—help a child feel safe and confident. The more freedom a child has to experiment and express themselves—to jump, to run, to shout, especially with a caring and creative adult—the more relaxed and confident they will feel.

Teachers are not able to provide all of the reassurance and physical contact that all children need. Parents can provide much of this stimulation and reassurance for their child at home, making school easier.²

Learning about the importance of sitting

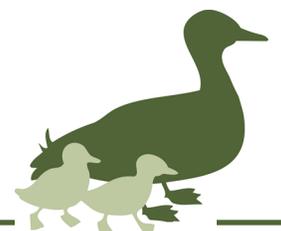
Imagine a child who has never been encouraged to sit—for a story, a meal, etc. Now imagine this child starting school, where he is expected to sit still for increasingly longer periods of time. Think how much easier it would be if he had some practice sitting still for even a short period. Parents can provide this experience by encouraging children to be still and attentive during many routine activities. In addition to helping children learn to sit still for certain activities, this practice can foster nurturing and attachment, establish routines, and promote early learning.

Making it easier to sit

Children cannot be taught to simply sit still. Sitting still is a physical ability based on a number of factors. What can be managed are the conditions that affect the child's ability.

Biological factors that affect a child's ability to sit still include physical well-being, recent exer-

See Sitting, page 2



PROGRAM NEWS

Arkansas Passes Home Visiting Legislation

In March of 2013, Governor Mike Beebe signed into law a measure that sets up one of the strongest home visiting systems in the country by ensuring investments are directed to programs that are proven to achieve successful results for children and families. The act also requires that home visiting programs track and measure outcomes such as maternal and infant health, family self-sufficiency and school readiness.

The law requires that at least 90 percent of Arkansas' funding for home visiting go to support

evidence-based or promising programs, such as Healthy Families Arkansas, ensuring the state will receive solid returns on investment for taxpayers and strong results for participating families. The policy also sets forth a clear process for measuring outcomes across all state-funded home visiting programs, which includes collaboration and data-sharing between departments that oversee home visiting services, including the State Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board, which manages the Arkansas Children's Trust Fund.

Sitting, continued

cise, nutrition, rest, mental alertness, and mature neurological functioning.

External factors may include noise or visual distractions, poor scheduling, or inappropriate expectations for a child's age and ability.

Parents can change or influence many of the factors that will help their child sit still. Loren Shlaes, a pediatric occupational therapist, has this advice for parents who come to her for help with fidgety children:

"Give him lots and lots of intense exercise and time outside every single day, drastically reduce screen time, make sure he gets plenty of sleep, and minimize sweets and nutritionally empty foods, substituting whole, fresh, organic, unprocessed foods. Turn off your electronic devices when you're with him and give him your full, undivided attention. If you're nervous about not giving him all the enrichment classes, here are some ideas: play lots of classical music at home, read to him regularly, provide craft activities, and do things together as a family.

If he still having problems, there are most likely underlying causes...that an occupational therapist...can help you uncover and correct."³



The ability to sit still for long periods, control impulses, filter distractions, maintain flexible attention, and focus on high level skills like reading, writing and problem solving is valued by parents and teachers. They would do well to remember that this skill is not taught, but that the conditions that support it can be cultivated.

When children have ample opportunities for physicality, some understanding of when it is considered more appropriate to be still, and adults who support their need for movement as part of learning, they will be better able to coordinate their heads and their bodies in all different kinds of situations.

1 Edwards, Marissa. "Can't Sit Still? Tips for Helping Kids Sit Still." *Neighborhood Parents Network*. N.p., 13 Feb. 2012. Web. 12 July 2013. <<http://www.npnparents.org/posts/240.can-t-sit-still-tips-for-helping-kids-sit-still>>

2 Wipfler, Patty. "My Child Won't Sit Still at Circle Time. What Should I Do?" *BabyCenter*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 July 2013. <http://www.babycenter.com/404_my-child-wont-sit-still-at-circle-time-what-should-i-do_70240.bc>

3 Shlaes, Loren. "When a Child Can't Sit Still." *PediatricOT*. N.p., 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 12 July 2013. <<http://pediatricot.blogspot.com/2011/03/when-child-cant-sit-still.html>>.

PARENTING PAGE

Tips for Helping Children Sit Still

Two ways that parents can help their children develop the ability to sit still are to practice it in every day situations and to support children's need for movement even when sitting still is expected (or preferred by adults).

Ways to Practice Sitting Still

Story time—encourage your child to sit while you read. Do not read if he is climbing on you or jumping around. He will learn that if he wants a story, he will need to sit on your lap or beside you. Graduate from one short book, to a longer book, to two books, then three (or more!).

Meal time—encourage children to sit still for both meals and snacks. Use a table and chairs, or even a rug on the floor. Discourage them from getting up and walking around until they are finished.

Quiet activity time—set aside a special time and place for quiet activities, such as coloring, play dough, or crafts. Encourage children to sit in this place during the activity. The activity can last for a short time, or be repeated throughout the day. Just be sure that each time, children are encouraged to stay in place until finished.

Play time—teach children the difference between moving and staying still. Play games like statue and tag. Role play being an object that doesn't move. Have a stare-down or contest to see who can keep from laughing.

Seat time—explain what you are doing as you strap your child into a car seat, stroller or shopping cart. Tell them that sometimes sitting still is part of doing something else. Sitting still while moving keeps them safe, just like sitting still while coloring lets their hands do all the work.

Parents engage in most of these activities every day. In addition to fostering attachment and learning, they are also establishing routines that include sitting for certain periods and activities. Children can apply

what they have learned in similar situations, such as school, as they get older.

Tips to Encourage Sitting Still

Heavy work—before asking a child to sit for a period of time, have him or her engage in five minutes of vigorous activity. Based on age, physical ability and space, children can do wall push ups, hopping or jumping, throw a ball, do gymnastics, climb or run. Heavy work helps calm fidgety behavior before sitting activities such as travel,

table work or circle time.

Transitions—whenever possible, allow five minutes between sitting activities for physical movement. After leaving the car, but before sitting in a waiting room, have children take a walk around the building or hop on one foot across the parking lot.

Distractions—to encourage attention on the task at hand, remove distractions. Provide a quiet place for reading, or create a special area, such as a floor mat for play dough. Re-

place the TV with soft music. For activities such as waiting or riding in a car, provide distractions. Toys or games that keep eyes and hands busy will help keep bodies still.

Strategies for school—find out how much unstructured play time your child will have during school. Parents may need to provide more physical activity at home to compensate. If your child still requires more movement during the day, ask your child's teacher about providing opportunities to experience movement without getting up and moving around. Examples include "fidgets" (Koosh ball, pencil toppers, clay), gum or therapeutic tools such as air cushions and resistance bands.

Your child won't sit still just because you tell her to, and learning it doesn't mean she will be able to do it. But with understanding and creativity from the adults around her, she will have plenty of opportunities to see and do what it means to be still.



RESOURCES



LITTLE children BIG challenges:incarceration

Nearly 2.7 million children have an incarcerated parent, yet few resources exist to help the youngest of these children. To meet this need, Sesame Street is launching its “Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration” Initiative, which will include multimedia, bilingual (English/Spanish) materials targeting young children (ages 3-8) of incarcerated parents, their families and caregivers, and the range of other professionals who touch these children.

These free materials include:

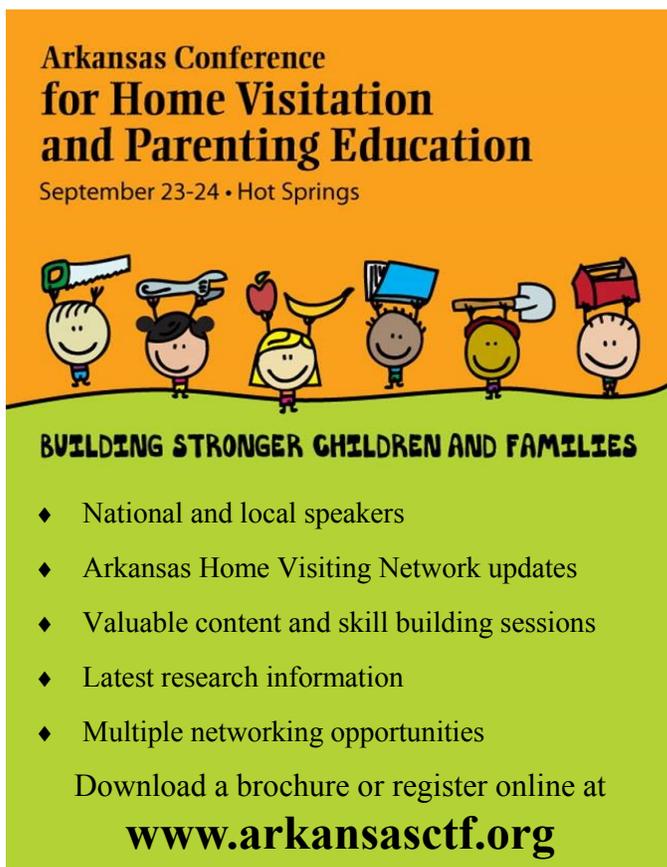
- A multimedia resource kit with a Sesame Street DVD, a Guide for Parents and Caregivers, and a Children’s Storybook, available at www.sesamestreet.org/incarceration.
- Sesame Street Incarceration app for adults to use on tablets and phones, available on [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sesamestreet.org/incarceration), the [App Store](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/sesame-street-incarceration/id1444444444) (Apple) and the [Amazon Apps for Android on Kindle Fire](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01LWVWVWV).
- [Youtube.com/user/SesameStreetInCommunities](https://www.youtube.com/user/SesameStreetInCommunities) featuring playlists of videos related to the initiative.

For more information, contact Sesame at incarceration@sesame.org.

Available for Download

The Missouri Children’s Trust Fund developed the electronic flyer, [A Toxic Combination: Children and Methamphetamine](#), to assist home visitors in being informed and safe in their work with families where meth use is a possibility.

Available to download from <http://ctf4kids.org/>



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Download a brochure or register online at
www.arkansasctf.org

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