

## Sitting for Tabletop Tasks

Sensory processing differences may contribute to difficulties sitting at a table to complete a task. We need to use a lot of sensory information to sit at a table, remain focussed and be able to engage in an activity. We need to understand where our body is in space to sit on our chair and be able to engage our muscles to keep us sitting upright. We need to tolerate the feel of the seat underneath us and the objects that we might use in the activity.

When using these strategies remember to consider your child's age, any potential risks and their sensory preferences. Reflect on how to adapt these strategies to best support your child to feel calm and organised during tabletop tasks.

Area of Difficulty	Strategy	Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments.
Child has difficulties sitting still in seat	Heavy work tasks prior to static tabletop tasks: this can provide the body the movement it seeks prior to the task. Stimulating muscles and joints has a lasting calming effect (e.g., pushing/pulling, lifting and carrying objects). More examples can be found here: <a href="#">heavy-muscle-work-activities.pdf</a>	
	Explore 'active seating' options such as a move 'n' sit cushion or a ball chair.	
	Check the child can tolerate the texture of the chair. Use a small cushion to soften the seat surface if needed.	
	Add resistance bands or Bouncyband across the front legs of the chair to enable the child to push against it.	
	Complete work in alternative positions: standing and placing work on a vertical surface, laying on the floor propped on the elbows, sitting in a large beanbag.	
	Break activities down into small chunks and enable a movement break between tasks. This could be collecting equipment/resources, taking messages, filling up their bottle.	
	Check the chair and desk height. Ideally your child should be seated 90 degrees at elbows, hips and knees. Consider a box, books under feet (use non-slip mat for stability), booster seat, alternative chair or desk raisers.	
Child slumps in seat or props self on elbows heavily	Engage the child in alerting activities prior to static tabletop tasks to help "wake up" their body. Alerting activities could include jumping, larger movements, have a crunchy snack or drinking a cold drink through a straw. See <a href="#">Sensory Alerting</a> or	

to keep their head upright	for further information see <a href="#">Worksheet D-Attention and Focus</a> in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Motor Skills Resource Pack' on our website.	
	Ensure child has appropriate seating to enable their feet to reach the floor. Adjust chair or desk height to allow a 90-degree angle at hips, knees and elbows. See <a href="#">Worksheet C-Sitting Posture</a> p. 1 in "Occupational Therapy Motor Skills Resource Pack" on our website for further information.	
	Build core stability to help your child sit upright for longer periods without becoming tired or uncomfortable. Activities to improve this could include kneeling whilst engaging in activities against a wall, throwing at a target, planks, or push-ups. See the "core strengthening exercises" in p.2-3 <a href="#">Worksheet C-Sitting Posture</a> in "Occupational Therapy Motor Skills Resource Pack" on our website for further information.	
	Break activities down into small chunks and enable a movement break or alerting activities between tasks.	
Child cannot sustain sitting in chair for length of activity	Use combination of above strategies to ensure the child is comfortable in their seating and has access to necessary movement activities to help them remain still and focussed.	
	Provide clear expectations about how long they are required to remain in the seat. For example, use timers, clear visual timetables, now and next boards.	
	Increase time in seat slowly between regular movement breaks/activities. Over time extend the expected time for sitting and/or the length of time moving.	
Child tends to vacate their seat due to being distracted by the environment.	Have a copy of the task instructions at their desk to prevent them becoming distracted by the white board.	
	Keep the child's desk at the end of rows to reduce the distraction of pupils either side.	
	Consider the use of a mobile screen to block out excess noise and visual distractions. This sense of "containment" can also have a regulating effect on the child. (Be mindful to include the child in this decision as some children may be averse to feeling "blocked off" from their environment)	
	Avoid harsh/bright lighting.	
	Where possible reduce distractions- keep objects stored away so the child is not tempted to seek these out. Ensure their desk space remains clear and organised with resources required.	

	Reduce visual distractions on walls or ceilings around the vicinity. Reduce visual distractions from screens in the background, for example avoid TV or interactive whiteboards being left on.	
	Use ear defenders or headphone with an agreed playlist to listen to in the background during periods of self-directed work. Ensure the child has breaks from wearing headphones to prevent dependency on these.	
	Providing fidget toys can offer sensory input for children who are easily distracted and seek sensory stimulation, helping them filter out other sensory distractions.	
	See Worksheet Z-Attention and Focus in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Sensory Resource Pack' on our website.	
Child encroaches into other children's space	Help the child 'notice' when they are encroaching into another's space by commenting on their position or asking them questions.	
	Heavy work tasks prior to static tabletop tasks: this helps 'wake up' the muscles and joints helping the brain know where the body is in space. For examples see: <a href="#">heavy-muscle-work-activities.pdf</a>	
	Visual cues such as a line down the middle of the table may help the child 'notice' where their body is in relation to their desk space.	
	If your child is right-handed, place them on the right side of desk or if your child is left-handed, place them on the left side.	

### Useful Resources

Video's and short guides [Movement Activities & Exercises](#)

Heavy Work activity ideas <https://www.wyevalley.nhs.uk/media/679031/heavy-muscle-work-activities.pdf>