

Physical positioning ideas for play, art and music

Below are a few ideas to help you with positioning your child or young person in different positions for play and activities.

Changing position is great for your child as it gives them:

- A different perspective of the world,
- Helps their physical function,
- Good for helping respiratory issues. (Staying on one or two positions can mean the lungs do not work as effectively).

Some of these positions may be appropriate for your child and some may not, depending on their physical ability and medical needs. If you are not sure about any of these, or there are any risks, please contact one of the Physical Therapies Team through the hospice first before trying.

We will cover the following positions:

- Lying on your back reaching up
- Side lying
- Lying supported on your tummy to reach for toys
- Four point kneeling
- Kneeling and high kneeling
- Sitting

Lying on your back reaching up

It can be hard work to reach up to toys as you are working against gravity. Also your legs can get stiff if left straight. So here are some ideas to help...



- Lie on your back with a pillow under your knees so they are more relaxed. This also helps keep your legs nicely in line with your hips.
- You can place something in between your legs if your knees pull together.
- If you want to reach up to something it can help to have some support under your shoulders and upper arms so you are not fighting against gravity.
- Massaging arms and hands helps too as it helps circulation and awareness of where your arms and hands are.

Side lying

This is a really good position for playing as your child can reach for, and see toys or musical instruments, and their arms will not get as tired as they will when reaching up.

- If there are no reasons why your child cannot side lie then lying on both sides is good for them as it allows the ribs to expand on either side.
- If your child needs support to stay on their side, you can use a rolled up towel behind their back and head. You can always place this against a wall or the bed side then lie your child back against it.
- Try placing a roll in front of their tummy too to prevent them from rolling forwards.
- You might need to assist your child with their shoulder position they are lying on to ensure they are comfortable.
- When we side lie, our top leg hangs down and this can cause hip pain. Try using a pillow between your child's legs to support the upper leg.
- To encourage your child to use their hands, you can use some toys they can easily reach to play with



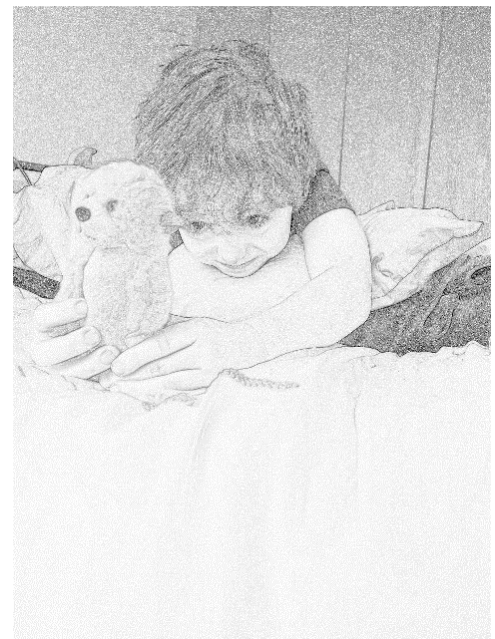
Lying on your tummy supported to reach for toys

Some people are wary of placing children on their tummy in case they get upset. However, so long as your child doesn't have any medical reasons not to be on their front, it can help with:

- Head control,
- Hand, arm and shoulder strength,
- Back strength and mobility.

It's important to do fun things with your child on their front and they might like to see your face so lying down so they can see you can help.

You can use pillows or rolled up towels to support so your child's chest and head is lifted up to help them push or reach through their arms (see below).



If your child is small you can support them as per the diagram below.



If your child is small you can also use physical contact with you to achieve this position. If very little, they can lay on your chest, or across your lap.

It can help to assist your child to keep their bottom down so they feel safe and stable. In this position, they can use their strength to lift their head and push through their arms.



Four point kneeling

If your child is able to do this, it can really help with:

- Arm/hand strength and coordination,
- Leg strength
- Stability around their pelvis and shoulders,
- Head control,
- Back/trunk strength.

If they cannot achieve this position unsupported and are small, you can use rolls or cushions to help lift them up.

If they are larger and you have a peanut ball their size, you can use this and encourage them to reach forwards and roll backwards. Be careful with manual handling if they cannot support themselves.

If they can achieve four point kneeling you can see if they can reach an arm forwards to play with a toy.



Kneeling and High Kneeling

Kneeling is a good position for children with mild to moderate trunk control to develop this further.

You can support from behind by kneeling with your legs either side of your child if they need support around their ribs. You can raise or lower your hands depending on how much support they need.

If your child can kneel on their own you can encourage them to high kneel. They may find it easier initially to high kneel against a chair.

Good activities to try are:

- Balloon volleyball.
- Use a ziplock bag with paint in and tape it to a patio door for them to squish around and make patterns.



Sitting

There are a lot of positions you can use to help your child develop their sitting ability and engage with play.



- You can sit with your back against a supporting surface like a sofa with your child between your legs with their back against your chest. Use your hands to support their trunk if needed.
- You can place your arms under their arms to help support their body and to help them lift and use their arms so they are not having to work against gravity.

Try and ensure your child's pelvis is close to you so their trunk is upright. They may prefer to have straight legs or slightly bent legs. It is harder to keep your body upright with cross legged sitting as it tilts your pelvis back and so curves your back.

- If your child sits with one leg flexed as shown you can encourage reaching to the side for a toy to work on balance skills. Make sure this is not too much pressure on your back.



- You can also make a floor table with an upturned box. See the sensory play ideas page and the image below.



- It's good to have the box at your child's elbow height so that their arms are supported and they can reach for toys.
- If they tend to knock toys off you can always add sides to the top of the box to act as a block.
- Having your child leaning against a sofa gives them some support and if you feel they need a little extra support you can sit on the sofa with your legs either side of your child

- Another way children can sit is on a bench or stool with you behind them. Make sure their feet are supported and you are comfortable. This is also good to be done at a table or when doing an activity at eye height

We hope that helps and gives you some ideas. We are also developing some fun groups and advice on changing positions to help you during lockdown.

Please contact your hospice if you would like any further advice and ask for one of the occupational therapists or physiotherapists.

References:

1. Positioning for Play by Rachel B Diamant
2. Finnie's Handling the Young Child with Cerebral Palsy at Home edited by Eva Bower