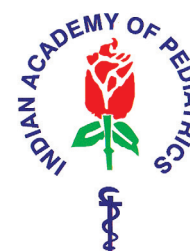


Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

School and My Child: Parental Concerns Regarding Schooling

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10 FAQs on SCHOOL AND MY CHILD: PARENTAL CONCERNS REGARDING SCHOOLING

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2. What is the right age to start education?
3. How to decide among various educational boards, CBSE, state boards, international boards, etc.?
4. Should we consider home schooling/open schooling especially with the Corona pandemic?
5. It is said that children learn better in their mother tongue but the higher education and job prospects are better for English language. How can we address this issue?
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7. How much time should the children be doing assignments, homework, etc. at home? What good study skills, we should promote in our children?
8. Should we encourage extracurricular activities and sports in the school?
9. What food stuffs are good to take during school lunch breaks? What is your opinion regarding mid-day meal and school canteen food?
10. Can you guide us about how to help the child with online learning?

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School and My Child: Parental Concerns Regarding Schooling

Q1

What school characteristics should I consider, while selecting a school for my child?

The most important factor that influences a child's schooling is his feeling of connectedness to the school. The home, the social milieu, and the school should be culturally compatible for the child to feel comfortable at school.

Policies: Management policies of the school, the principal's strategies, the teachers' competence, the student teacher ratio, the educational board, the medium, and the scope for cocurricular activities all contribute in the school environment and should be looked for.

The infrastructure: The campus, the building, the classrooms, the furniture, the playground, the equipment, the hygiene and health facilities, etc. should be given due consideration.

Others: The fees structure, school timings, the distance from the home, commute facilities, feedbacks from other parents, etc. should be considered.

The priorities should be decided according to the availability of choice, the family circumstances, the child's temperament and interests, and his/her individualized requirements.

The Best School

Every child is different and has his strengths and weaknesses. The best school is the one that promotes his strengths (for example, in a sport activity) and helps him to overcome his weaknesses (for example, in academics). A school that is open for communications and suggestions and willing to join hands with parents for the well-being of children should be given precedence.

Q2

What is the right age to start education?

The brain growth occurs rapidly till the age of 6 years when the brain is still moldable like wet clay. The nerve cells and their connections are strengthened during this crucial period. Those nerve paths in the brain which are used repeatedly become strong and the ones that are not used are lost. Sensory development, small muscle control, hand eye coordination, balancing, language and communication, social mannerisms, and adjusting with peers are some of the points the child needs to learn in this phase of life (**Fig. 1**). It forms the basis of further learning, both formal and informal.

Therefore, it is necessary to make the best use of this phase of life and provide a developmentally appropriate environment to the young children.

The joint families and the social milieu prevalent in the past provided ample opportunities for the child to get exposed to various stimulating situations. Now, with the changing societal fabric and nuclear families, children miss out on these important learning opportunities. Hence, it is desirable that they are exposed to a setup, where there is a chance for informal learning and peer interaction, after the age of 3 years. This has also been suggested in the New Education Policy of Government of India, 2020.

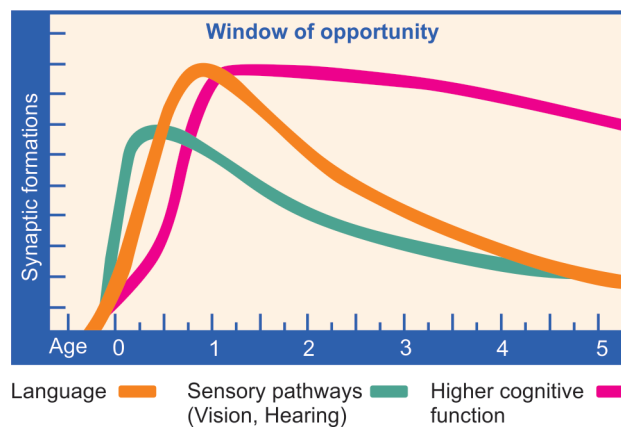


Fig. 1: Early brain development.

Q3

How to decide among various educational boards, CBSE, state boards, international boards, etc.?

To decide the Board for the child, following considerations are useful:

- *Location:* State board schools are available till the remotest places, while CBSE and other boards' schools are generally located only in metros. The board should be selected depending on the family's chances of relocating (as in case of transfer or job change). The child should not be required to jump educational boards frequently.
- *Academic contents:* State level boards focus on regional contexts and promote academics accordingly. They impart knowledge based on local culture, history, geography, general information, vocational training as per the local trends and requirements. The national boards follow the national context. Their curricula are more extensive and academically more demanding. But, if the student is likely to appear for the national level entrance tests, these boards are a better choice.
- *Process of learning:* The Indian system of education, as of now, focuses more on outcomes measured by paper pencil examinations. The information load, the rote learning style, and the structured pattern of addressing the curricula are challenging for many students.

International Boards

International boards are, in contrast, pretty much child centric. There is a wide choice and flexibility regarding what to learn and how to learn. They promote self-learning and encourage personalized learning styles. They assess efforts rather than the end results of learning and also give due weightage to extra-curricular achievements. They aim at helping the children compete in the international education stream. Schooling for such boards is comparatively expensive.

Q4

Should we consider home schooling/open schooling especially with the Corona pandemic?

- Education of children is massively affected in the pandemic and different methods employed to continue the formal learning are grossly inadequate. Home schooling is increasingly adapted by many parents, looking at the uncertainty and risk of in person schooling.
- National Institute of Open Schooling is a Board of Education under the Ministry of Human Resources, Government of India, at par with other boards. It runs learner friendly distant self-learning courses for all school years up to 12th standard since 1989. It also conducts informal courses on life skills and vocational training.
- The course material is delivered via post as well as through dedicated radio and TV channels. There is a lot of flexibility regarding choice of subjects and duration of the course. The contact programs and assignments are run, and the final assessment examinations are conducted.
- The physically handicapped, the school dropouts, and the residents of rural and remote areas had been the beneficiaries of this board since long. It also helps the students who pursue vocational trainings or undertake jobs while completing their formal school education.
- The open schooling system has a robust and time-tested infrastructure for remote learning of school going children. During COVID times, it appears to be a reasonable alternative for maintaining the continuity of structured education of the children.

Q5

It is said that children learn better in their mother tongue but the higher education and job prospects are better for English language. How can we address this issue?

“Mother tongue” is presumed to be the child’s “first” language—the language of greatest proficiency and comfort. It may or may not be the regional language of the state.

Many studies conducted around the world have shown that children in bilingual (two languages) programs, with mother tongue as the medium of instruction, perform better than their peers taught in other languages. They have a deeper awareness of how languages work, display greater flexibility of thinking, and achieve better academic outcomes. Further, the longer they remain in mother tongue education, the better is their knowledge retention and performance in the school.

Why English?

- Humans have a great potential to learn many languages. The Central Government has an official three-language policy. Technical and higher education courses in India generally run in English. It also serves as an important link language within our country and also globally.
- English, therefore, should be introduced as a subject in the early years so that the children learn its basics as an additional language, early in life. As they master it, the same can be gradually used as a co-teaching medium for science and mathematics. This will give our children the best of both the worlds.

However, if the child is not able to cope up, he should not be burdened with English medium.

Q6

What should ideally be the weight of the school bag?

Children carrying heavy school bags may suffer from backache, neckache, armache, and headache. Furthermore, they view their school as a source of “burden” and get into psychological stress. Proper planning and implementation of subject-wise timetable, lesser number of books and copies, loose sheets and files, and school lockers are some ways to reduce the burden on tender shoulders (**Fig. 2**).

Government Guidelines

In 2016, the Union Human Resource and Development Ministry formed the guidelines to ensure that students are not burdened by carrying heavy bags to schools. These guidelines were framed after it was observed that the load of school bag is increased by bringing textbooks, homework and classwork notebooks, rough work notebooks, guides, water bottles, lunch box, etc.

Weight limits of school bags for students as per the Government of India are as follows:

- *Classes 1 and 2:* Not exceeding 1.5 kg
- *Classes 3 to 5:* 2–3 kg
- *Classes 6 and 7:* 4 kg
- *Classes 8 and 9:* 4.5 kg
- *Class 10:* 5 kg

In May 2019, the Karnataka government also ordered all schools in the state to ensure that the weight of a child’s school bag does not exceed 10% of the weight of the child.

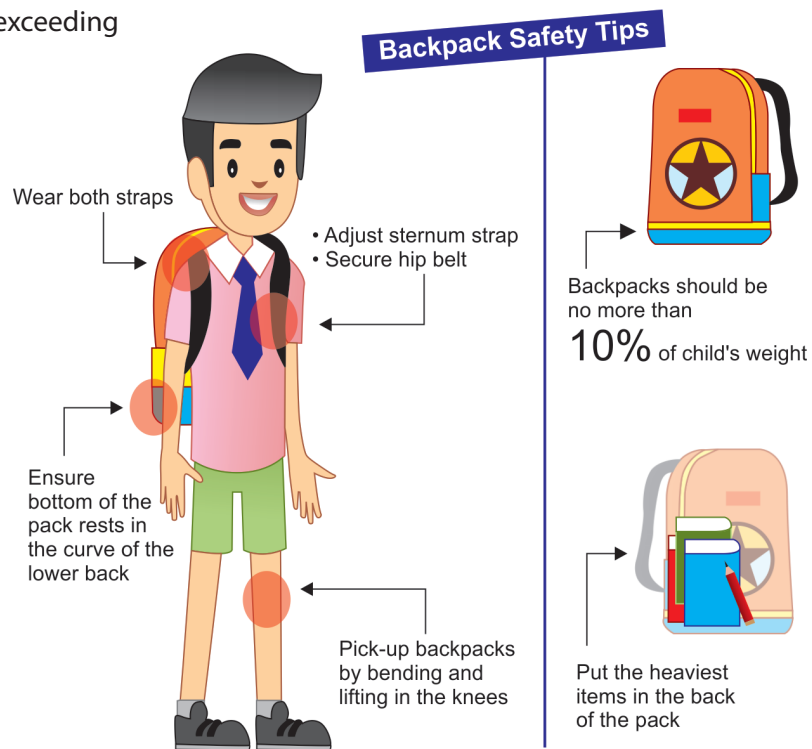


Fig. 2: Healthy ways of carrying school bags.

Q7

How much time should the children be doing assignments, homework, etc. at home? What good study skills we should promote in our children?

Time for assignments varies with age, half an hour in primary classes, 1 hour in middle school and 2 hours in high schools is acceptable. Home work should preferably be activity based.

Smart study habits imbibed in school age help the children to complete their work timely and fruitfully. Children should be helped in the following ways:

- Provide a quiet place free from distraction and interruption.
- Provide a structured timetable of the day with designated study time.
- Topics to study should be pre-decided.
- A short break after every 30–50 minutes study session.
- Not to remain hungry while studying.
- No multitasking such as studying and watching TV together.
- Studying with friends, discussions, sharing notes, and quizzing.

While studying, they should follow three “S”:

1. *Skim*: It means to review.
2. *Scrutinize*: Focus on important stuff in the chapter.
3. *Sweep up*: After finishing the topic, revise the assigned chapters again.

Memory Technique

- *Grouping*—organizing material by grouping similar concepts or ideas.
- *Creating associations*: Associating something new with something already known.
- *Learning actively*: Moving of hands, pacing back and forth and using gestures while reciting.
- *Creating models, pictures, flowcharts and mnemonics*
- *Repeating* and reciting few important points
- *Writing it down*

Children should be encouraged to discuss difficult topics with their friends and teachers. Discussions help in clearing doubts and also the discussed things are better memorized.

Q8

Should we encourage extracurricular activities and sports in the school?

Yes, definitely the schools and the parents should encourage extracurricular activities among children. These activities including the National Cadet Corps (NCC), Scout, etc. offer children a chance to explore themselves, improve their self-esteem and sometimes may open a career path for them. The healthy competitive spirit of these informal school activities imbibe a camaraderie among the children.

Sports: Sports help in building a healthy body and a healthy mind. Children learn cooperation, team spirit, and sportsman spirit. They are more likely to perform better in stressful situations and learn to face the failures boldly.

Performing arts: Dancing, singing, theater, and fine arts such as drawing, painting, etc. boost creativity and are good stress busters. Children get a chance to express themselves through these art forms. Involving children in various competitions and stage performances helps them to overcome the stage fear and boosts their confidence. Such group activities teach them adjustment skills, empathy, communication skills, and leadership qualities.

Q9

What food stuffs are good to take during school lunch breaks? What is your opinion regarding mid-day meal and school canteen food?

A healthy and hygienic school lunch covers one-third of nutritional needs of the child. This goes a long way in his physical, mental, and academic well-being, and also inculcates in him, right eating habits.

School Lunch

School lunch should be made up of cereals such as wheat, rice, lentils along with vegies/salads/fruits. It should be attractive, colorful, tasty, and easy to eat. Rather than *roti sabji*, children prefer a roll of the same or paratha in the school tiffin. Freshly cooked homemade items such as *idli*, *upama*, *chila*, and *sandwiches* are easy healthy options. Products such as cheese, egg, and nuts can add nutritional value to the lunch.

Avoid Junk Food

Junk food that is high in calories and fats, ultra-processed food such as noodles, pizzas, and carbonated and caffeinated cold drinks should best be avoided in the lunch pack as well as in the school canteens. If due care is taken, school canteens can serve healthy and hygienic food and meet the nutritional demands of the students. They also imbibe a sense of equality among them.

Mid-day Meals

Mid-day meals are a great way to improve not only the nutritional status of children but also their school attendance. They provide significant financial relief to the economically backward families and save the children from child labor. The meals should be nutritious, culture compatible and preferably freshly cooked from the ingredients easily available in the locality, taking utmost care of health and hygiene.

Q10

Can you guide us about how to help the child with online learning?

Parents should familiarize themselves with the new educational system and new technology. They should provide the means of learning and guide their children in using the means such as laptop, tablet, etc.

- They should coview the online lessons (or study material) for students mandatorily for preprimary and up to 2nd grade; preferably for 3rd–5th graders; and desirably for older children. Explanatory conversation and guidance help children to learn the contents better.
- Elder children should be offered a helping hand to learn new ways and means of learning to ease out their online work.
- Schools should be requested not to exceed the age and stage appropriate recommendations of time and number of online classes (**Table 1**). Learning should be stress free and academic demands should be reasonable.

TABLE 1: Recommendations on “time allotment for screen-based remote learning”.

Standard/Class	Preprimary	1–2	3–5	6–8	9–10	11–12
Screen time per session (min/day)	30	30	30	30–45	30–45	30–45
Maximum sessions/day	1	2	2	3	4	4
Number of days per week	3	3	5	5	5	6

Source: Adapted from Indian Academy of Pediatrics Guidelines on School Reopening, Remote Learning and Curriculum in and After the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic. Indian Pediatrics, December 2020.

- The home environment should be calm and conducive for learning.
- Cyber safety rules should be taught to the children and their online activities should be monitored.
- Children should be encouraged to follow ergonomic practices while using screens. Eye strain should be reduced by asking them to look at an object 20 feet away, for 20 seconds, after every 20 minutes of screening. Frequently blinking of eyes should be encouraged (**Fig. 3**).
- Online learning is stressful for children. They should not be overburdened with unrealistic academic expectations. Healthy lifestyle and good bonding should be maintained to reduce the stress.

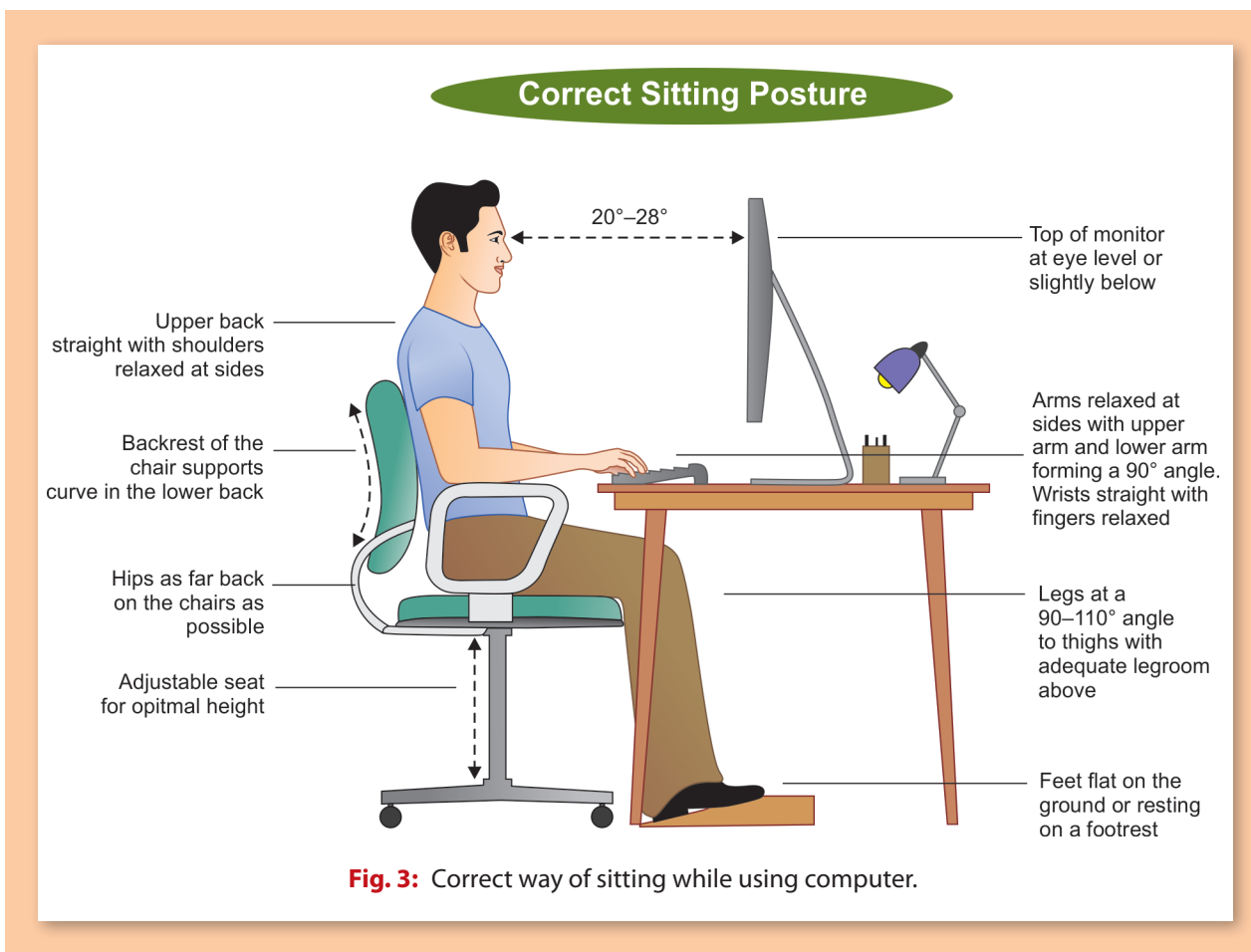


Fig. 3: Correct way of sitting while using computer.

SUMMARY

- The selection of educational board, school, and medium should be individualized according to the child and the family circumstances.
- Early informal schooling from 3 years onward helps in brain growth.
- The extracurricular activities are an important part of learning.
- Healthy home-made foodstuffs are the best option for school meals.
- Underprivileged children should not be deprived of mid-day meals.
- Children need parental help and supervision during online learning.