

## Occupational Therapy

### CALMING WAYS TO POSITION YOUR PREMATURE BABY

When babies are born full-term, they come into the world all curled up. This is called physiological flexion. This is important for development as it gives babies a sense of the limits of their body, and helps them organize themselves. Premature babies often haven't had the 'squishing' in utero that creates the physiological flexion, and lack the sense of confinement. Premature babies have to be assisted to maintain certain positions: they are at the mercy of gravity and have a very difficult time maintaining a flexed (bent) posture. Proper positioning of a premature child can help their development and discourage difficulties. These positions are also good for babies who have increased muscle tone (stiff muscles).

Positioning means how to place your baby in an optimal manner. This handout will give you some ideas of how to place your baby to help his or her development.

#### **How positioning can help: Positioning...**

- promotes flexion (bending similar to that of a full-term baby).
- increases the child's awareness of their body.
- encourages self-regulation (learning to calm themselves down) and behavioural organization (learning to organize their body).
- facilitates the development of vision and hearing.
- facilitates the development of head control.



#### **The basic principles of positioning with a premature baby:**

1. Some babies cannot tolerate a lot of handling (touch or movement) so try to use slow, gentle movements whenever positioning your baby.
2. When repositioning your baby try to keep his arms and legs close to his body. This will help him maintain a feeling of stability and stay 'in control'.
3. Try to use positions which encourage:
  - flexion (bending, bringing the limbs closer to the body).
  - hands near the mouth.
  - symmetry (both sides of the body in the same position).
  - a downward gaze: this allows the baby to see his hands, which is important for fine motor development.
4. Encourage prone (on the tummy) and sidelying positions. Supine (on the back tend encourage extension (pushing backwards) and a frogged position of the legs.



Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Different Positions

#### Prone

- Prone means “on the tummy”.
- This position helps with the developme control and also facilitates flexion.

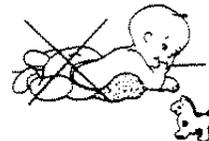


Place the baby so that:

- the hips and knees are bent (legs are tucked under his body).
- his bottom is higher than his shoulders.
- his arms are bent and if possible his hand placed near his mouth.
- try to provide ‘boundaries’ at the head, side and feet, like a nest.

Ideas:

- Diapers or rolled up towels can provide support.
- Place one on each side of the hips to prevent frogging.
- Place a blanket roll all the way around the child.



#### Supine

- Supine means ‘on the back’.
- This position will help to develop a chin tuck (looking down slightly) and also a midline (head straight in the middle) head position.

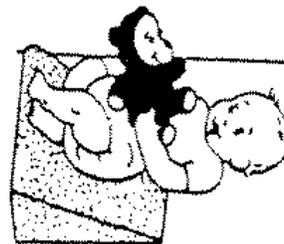


Place the baby so that:

- the baby’s knees and hips are tucked up toward the belly.
- knees are in line with the hips (not frogged).
- the shoulders are curled forward, hands are on the chest.
- the chin is tucked down.
- too much time lying on the back in a bad position (i.e., not flexed) can contribute to arching and a frogged position.



#### Supine continued



Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Ideas:

- Place a towel under the baby's head (not neck!) to lift his head up slightly. A bit of support on each side will help to keep his head in midline.
- To bring the shoulders forward, try rolling up a towel like a horseshoe and placing it under the baby's shoulders. Watch that the head doesn't go into extension (chin up towards the ceiling).
- Place a rolled up towel or diaper under the hips to lift his bottom up.
- A Boppy cushion can be great for positioning your child.

### Play Ideas

- Place toys toward the child's feet so that she has to look down (developing a chin tuck) in order to see them. As the child gets older you can try socks with bells on them to encourage reaching toward the toes.
- Bring your child's knees and feet towards her hands.

### Sidelying

- Sidelying means lying on one side.
- This position is important to encourage hand to mouth play (helps to calm down the baby) and also promote flexion.



### Place the baby so that:

- The hips and knees are bent.
- Arms are cuddled forward at the shoulders, slightly bent.
- Head is in line with the body, or bent forward slightly.
- Remember to switch sides!



### Ideas

- Place a roll behind the baby from her shoulders to her hips.
- Place another one (or a teddy bear) between her arms and legs.

### Supported Sitting

- Supported sitting means sitting with support.
- This position allows the child to reach for objects and interact with others.

### Place the baby so that:

- Hips and knees are bent.
- Arms are brought forward.
- Chin is tucked down.



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### Ideas

- Try using a car seat with a rolled up blanket around the head.

### Play Ideas

- Hand toys in front of the child to encourage him to reach.

Source: [www.therapybc.ca/eLibrary](http://www.therapybc.ca/eLibrary)