

# WHY DO YOU SIT ME UP?

By Sarita Gálvez

I never liked the idea of seating children early. At first the reasons were more related to the musculoskeletal, avoiding stress on the joints in training, mainly the spine and hips... Today I continue to avoid putting my little one in positions that he cannot achieve by himself, but the reasons go much further than merely the physical, today the reasons have to do with emotional and cognitive development, with sensory nutrition and the formation of a being of action.

A couple of years ago, when I was presenting the Move in Freedom approach to an audience of students, kinesiologists and educators, I started out by asking: "At what age do children sit down for the first time?" They all started making predictions. Some said six months, others proposed between four and five months ... and others said eight months. The consistent thing was that there was no consensus on the matter. And if we start from the beginning, we would have to analyze if we all understand the same thing by "sits for the first time". Seating babies prematurely is a widespread practice in our society.

In the 1950s, the paediatrician Emmi Pikler described how strange this common practice seemed to her and how those babies, who were seated prematurely, showed such a different postural development from children who move freely. She stated that the little ones were tense and more rigid, "as if they had swallowed a broomstick", a muscular tension that is expected due to the imbalance from being placed in a vertical position, when the anti-gravitational muscles have not yet been worked on in horizontal planes (muscles that develop when we spend a lot of time turning). In this way, when a child is placed in a position that he has not yet achieved on his own, the demand is also placed on the body and a rhythm is set for him.

It is not surprising that we ask ourselves what “sitting” is, because it seems that in the children's world there are significant differences between “remaining seated” and “sitting”, let me explain: for a child to remain seated, for some, means that they are put by an adult in this position and, given that he has been exposed many times to this imbalance, he has managed to overcome the imbalance and stay in the position. However, if this little one falls or slips, he cannot return to that position on his own. From a different point of view, sitting is a posture that the child builds from other transition postures and movements, it does not require exercises or training. Observing its spontaneous movement, a baby sits alone after turning both ways, after crawling and pivoting; in general, she will sit up only when she starts to crawl and, taking Emmi Pikler's studies as a reference, that is something that usually happens around nine months... yes, nine months.

As a consequence of the foregoing, we will understand that not sitting a child until he does it by himself only determines that adults must accompany those Nine months and, given the placing custom, convince the rest of the adults that in reality the fact that they do not sitting still is not a warning sign of delayed psychomotor development. From my professional and personal experience I want to be emphatic, since I think that a child who is not seated early and is exposed to a stimulating and safe environment of exploration, is a child who will develop displacement much earlier. When a 6-month-old discovers turns and discovers that if he turns more than once he can reach that object that catches his attention, he will begin to move. That means that you should not wait to crawl or walk to achieve higher goals, to reach what you propose, to feel safe in your body and at the same time, feel that you are an active body in space. Consequently, his spatial relationships are richer, he begins to relate to limits and becomes an active explorer of the environment.

On the other hand, if a child sits early, his legs are not activated and instead become a posture support. The legs of a child that moves freely are active, mobile and flexible, they are part of the turns and important motor

movements. These small brains also have the entire reception area of sensory information - coming from muscles, skin, joints - in constant activation, the map of the freely moving body is more nourished and, consequently, more complex and complete. Seated early and “put to play” in this position, it is likely that he will need constant assistance to take and explore the different objects that adults propose to him. This way, he will need assistance in obtaining objects and getting them back if he drops them. Thus, crying or different calls can be a constant when reacting to what is happening in their environment. A child who explores on the ground with the postures and movements that he masters, does not need this constant assistance, is able to achieve what he proposes using his body, or is flexible enough to change the object of interest for something else that is on their way. This is one of the reasons that led Emmi Pikler to title one of his books as "Peaceful Babies, Contented Mothers" since autonomous babies do not constantly need the adult and adults can develop other activities, without feeling like you are neglecting your children.

And so we could go on with many more reasons why we should avoid the social practice of prematurely sitting our little ones. Perhaps the last one is to think about how long that little one will spend sitting during his life ... it is most likely that, like most of us, he will spend a large part of this in that position, therefore, how much of a hurry do we have? Better let us give him the space for new explorations ...and what better than those months to actively discover the world around us!

[Translated by The Pikler Collection]