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## As school starts up, expert advises straightening up

BY DR. STEVEN WEINIGER Special to Florida Weekly



Before back-to-school slumps your child back into the “backpack hunch,” build his posture awareness and document his growing, changing body with a posture picture. Annual posture pictures are a great way to keep a visual record of how kids look and stand. While kids ignore a parent’s nagging to “straighten up,” seeing an image of their own body hunched over makes a big impact.

### A picture’s worth a thousand words

Upon seeing a posture picture, the first question people usually ask is “How’s my posture?” This is followed by a series of reasons why this particular picture doesn’t count and why it should be retaken. It always amazes me how completely

unaware people are of what their posture looks like. I have heard thousands of people say they know they have poor posture, but nevertheless maintain that they can stand straight when they want to.

From kids to adults, people are surprised to see themselves standing with obviously distorted posture, despite their best efforts to stand tall. Plus, the posture distortions of today’s kids, who spend hours slumped in front of TVs, crouched over video games and folded over computer keyboards, are likely to be worse than that of their parents as they age.

This is why it is important for parents to build posture consciousness in children and help them make changes to avoid having a dreaded “hunchback” later in life.

### Taking your child’s posture picture

Get a camera (the one on your phone is fine) and have your child stand in front of a wall or a door, facing you. When you are ready to take the picture, ask your child to stand normally, look straight ahead and relax. Then ask the child to take a deep breath and let it out. Now ask the child to show you his or her best posture.

Using these words makes your child form a mental note of his or her best posture. Kids — and adults — often experience a moment of uncertainty as they try to find exactly how their best posture feels. That is part of the goal of this exercise. After you've taken a picture from the front, repeat the process for a back and side view picture.

Print out the pictures, one to a sheet, and note how their posture looks.

Use a pen and ruler to perform a basic assessment of your child's postural alignment. On the front and back view pictures, simply draw a line from the middle of the head to the middle of the space between the feet. If your child has good posture alignment, it should be absolutely vertical. On the side view picture, draw a line from the ear to the ankle. This line should also be vertical if they have good alignment. If the pictures look significantly out of balance or uneven from left to right, consult a certified posture exercise professional, chiropractor, therapist or other posture specialized clinician for an in-depth evaluation.

Making kids aware of posture is the first step to encouraging them to maintain strong posture.

If nothing else, from a teen's point of view, stronger posture equates to looking more attractive, having more confidence and performing better at sports. They may still ignore your advice, but by establishing a baseline posture, they will remember how they look, and you'll have a good comparison to review next year when it's time for their annual posture picture. †

—Dr. Steven Weiniger is an internationally renowned expert on posture and anti-aging and is the author of "Stand Taller — Live Longer: An Anti-Aging Strategy." He is also senior editor of BodyZone.com, an online wellness resource offering a national directory of certified posture exercise professionals and other professionals specializing in posture improvement.



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