

EPILEPSY AND EDUCATION

FACT SHEET



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Epilepsy is an “invisible” condition. Seizures come and go, symptoms differ, and many aspects of life are affected. Others often don’t realise that people with epilepsy can have ongoing symptoms that aren’t seizures.

Are you teaching a student who has epilepsy? The following information may help you to understand their needs, providing some strategies so you can prepare the best possible environment for learning.



The importance of understanding epilepsy

Having epilepsy doesn’t automatically mean that person will have a learning disability. However, some people with epilepsy experience challenges such as memory problems, trouble concentrating, or fatigue - all of which can affect learning.

Epilepsy can impact learning in different ways for different reasons. That’s why it’s important for both children and adults with epilepsy to have the right support to reach their full potential.

Educators and support workers play a key role. Understanding how epilepsy affects thinking, emotions, and social skills can help create a learning environment where each person feels safe, supported, and able to succeed.

A neuropsychological assessment measures cognitive functioning, & can be very useful in determining strengths & deficits



Things educators and support staff can do

- Learn about epilepsy and seizures, how to recognise and respond to different seizures and understand the possible effects of seizures and treatment.
- Epilepsy Action Australia has short online courses including [Epilepsy Essentials](#) to improve your understanding
- Observe seizures. When a child has epilepsy, the teacher is often the adult who sees the child regularly and can be an important source of seizure description. Such observations can greatly help with management. See the [Observing And Recording Seizures Fact Sheet](#)
- Observe behaviour. Monitor the pattern of the student’s behaviour and learning processes. Share these observations with the person, family and relevant school staff to develop a consistent team approach.
- An epilepsy management plan (EMP) will help staff know how to respond to the persons seizures. Parents or a guardian are encouraged develop and provide a EMP for the school to use.
- Epilepsy Action Australia has an easy-to-use online [epilepsy management plan](#).

LEARNING

What affects learning in people with epilepsy?

There are several reasons why someone with epilepsy has difficulties with memory and concentration. Some possible causes include:

Medication side effects

There are many different antiseizure medications, with a range of side effects that may impact learning. Some common reported side effects of antiseizure medications include:

- Drowsiness, dizziness
- Tiredness and fatigue
- Headaches, blurred or double vision
- Poor concentration, or “fogginess” and attention problems
- Memory difficulties
- Poor balance and coordination
- Nausea, vomiting, weight gain or loss
- Hyperactivity, sleep difficulties
- Mood changes

If the student seems sleepy or lacking in energy during the day, or complaining of any above symptoms, parents should be informed.

Seizure activity

Seizures are brief, but the *after-effects* can be lasting. These can include tiredness, drowsiness, headaches, nausea, and mood changes.

After a seizure, the person is unlikely to be able to concentrate well and will most likely need a rest or sleep. It will depend on the child if they need to go home or not.

Seizures during sleep are going to disrupt sleep patterns for the rest of the night, and most likely cause daytime sleepiness and consequently difficulty concentrating.

Many people with epilepsy also have seizure-like *activity in the brain in-between seizures*. This is related to epilepsy, but not enough to generate a seizure, but can also contribute to learning difficulties.

If seizures are caused by some *another condition of the brain* or affect the area of the brain linked with cognition functions, they may change the way the brain handles information.

Psychosocial issues

Epilepsy is generally a long-term condition and may have similar effects on children as would other chronic diseases.

Seizures are unpredictable. Many people with epilepsy report that one of the most frightening thing about seizures is not knowing when they are going to happen. Even a child whose epilepsy is controlled with medication may still be anxious about having a seizure, especially at school. Therefore, it may be even more difficult to adapt to epilepsy than to other more predictable chronic conditions.

Negative reactions from peers, other students and school staff can negatively influence the person with epilepsy. The reactions of other people to seizures can affect how they feel about themselves and about having epilepsy. It is often more powerful than the physical effects of epilepsy.

Feelings of fear and anxiety are more common in people with epilepsy and can also lead to depression. It is important to observe the student for changes in behaviour and loss of interest in activities.

Overprotection and restrictions on activities can also affect a person’s self-esteem and make them feel ‘different’. Concern for the student’s safety may lead to restriction of normal school activities, which most children take for granted. This can increase the sense of social isolation.

Independence and social acceptance are important – so it is important to let the student participate in the usual activities at school, as much as possible – balancing safety and common sense versus risk.

Concerns and limitations should be discussed with the student and family and added to the epilepsy management plan.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES



- **Co-operative Learning:** group work develops listening and talking skills, encourages interaction with peers in problem solving and allows students to ask questions and learn from each other.
- **Task Analysis:** by breaking specific tasks into their most basic steps, teaching and learning stages can be established that the student needs to achieve to succeed.
- **Cueing:** This provides positive outcomes, particularly with listening activities. Warn the student ahead of time of the purpose of the activity. Give a quick summary of the task and ask if they understand what is needed. Knowing the purpose of the activity will help to keep them on task.
- **Reviewing:** Reviewing the processes used to solve a complex task can be helpful for the student.
- **Repetition:** This leads to the consolidation of skills learned in mastering a task. Unconsolidated skills are not likely to be applied to other learning tasks.
- **Mnemonics:** A memory aid that employs the use of verbal, visual, acoustic and symbolic techniques, which bridges prior learning with new knowledge and assists in memory development. Mnemonics may help people to remember facts, processes, procedures and diagrams.
- Regular evaluations of the above strategies.

On a day-to-day level:

- Make sure key words and main points are displayed for each subject.
- Give clear instructions suitably detailed for the student and their family to understand.
- Be aware that epilepsy can lead to changes in ability from day to day. Some days will be better than others.
- Keep the student in clear view in the classroom so that any possible seizure activity can be seen.

Look at Strong Foundations to learn more about epilepsy & learning



SUMMARY

Revealing epilepsy at school

Sometimes there is a need to tell the student's classmates (with permission) as they may be near by when a seizure happens. This sometimes lessens the child's concerns about having a seizure at school. At the same time, their friends learn how to help and not be afraid.

When describing seizures to children a demonstration helps. If this is difficult, a clear explanation, a large doll, puppet, story book or a video can be helpful.

Epilepsy Action Australia has online tools, courses and resources to help teach children and youth about epilepsy. [Contact us](#) for further information.



We have first aid video animations and posters that are suitable for adults and children. [Click here](#)

Education for teachers and students

Epilepsy Action Australia also provides training to teachers, support staff and students, by explaining seizures, epilepsy, planning and first aid.

We have [tools and resources](#) for different age groups and audiences.

For more go to:

[Seizure Smart Schools](#) or

[Seizure Safe Schools](#) program

Contact us on:

Phone: 1300 37 45 37

Email: epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au

[Book a telehealth appointment with an epilepsy nurse](#)

Visit our website



Disclaimer: This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice, and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.