

Special Education

Fact Only a small number of children with seizure disorders require special education.

Epilepsy often presents itself during the childhood years, and can therefore have a great impact on a child's education. People with epilepsy have been historically discriminated against and the stigma associated with the diagnosis of epilepsy still exists today. The unpredictability of epilepsy as well as the momentary random movements which occur during a seizure contribute to epilepsy being one of the most feared and complex disorders.

Children who are diagnosed with epilepsy often feel isolated and can be subjected to shame and ridicule by fellow students who are misinformed about the disorder or who are uncomfortable dealing with it. It is essential that parents and the school share good communication. The better informed the school is regarding epilepsy, the more supportive the teachers and students will be toward the child with epilepsy.

Parents' Roles in their Child's Education

Parents are crucial participants in helping education professionals make decisions regarding their child's special education. It is very important for parents to take an active role and to advocate on behalf of their child. Parents need to provide up-to-date medical information and information regarding their child's likes, dislikes, learning styles, interests, reactions to various situations, etc. to their child's school. An open line of communication is essential between parents and educators to facilitate the parents' involvement.

Parents have important roles in their child's education. Parents can reinforce and complement the learning that their child gains in school, advocate on behalf of

their child, express concerns and opinions regarding their child's education, make educators aware of their child's epilepsy and any special needs or treatment that their child requires, and ensure their child receives the appropriate accommodation as specified in their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Seek out additional professionals — both within the school board (teachers, special education coordinators, consultants, superintendents, SEAC representative, local epilepsy association, etc.) — and outside the school board (child's advocate, social worker, psychologist, etc.) who may be able to contribute to their child's special education program.

Tips for Parents

- 1 Get your child a medical identification bracelet or necklace stating that your child has epilepsy. Ensure that your child wears it at all times.
In case of an emergency, medical professionals can call the number on the back to obtain important information about your child's condition and the medications that your child is taking.
- 2 Meet with all of your child's teachers as well as other school professionals (teaching assistants, lunch room supervisors, bus driver, principal, etc) to discuss your child's condition.
Don't assume that all of your child's teachers will share this information.
As well, when your child changes teachers each year, don't assume that the teacher from the previous year has passed on the information regarding your child's disorder or that the new teacher has read your child's Ontario Student Record (OSR).
Speaking with new teachers will provide you with an opportunity to discuss information specific to your child and will give them a chance to ask you any questions they may have.
- 3 Prepare a "medical record" which can be provided to the paramedic should an ambulance need to be called. The medical record should be left with the child's teacher, secretary or principal. It should contain: the name of the child, the names and contact numbers for the parents, the names of the seizures your child experiences, the names and phone numbers of the child's family doctor and neurologist, the names and dosages of the medications currently being administered, any allergies or other medical conditions that the child has, and any special instructions regarding medications that should be administered in the event of a prolonged seizure. It is very important to keep this medical record up-to-date.
[For a sample **Emergency Information** sheet to give to caregivers see the file: "InfoSheet.pdf".]

What to Tell your Child's Teacher

- ∅ Provide the teacher with a simple explanation of epilepsy.
- ∅ Describe your child's seizures in terms of what they are called, what they look like and how long they last.
- ∅ Explain the necessary first aid procedures that the teacher should follow.
Explain to the teacher that your child will probably not need to go home after every seizure. Instead, s/he may need to rest for a period of time and will then be able to resume their normal school activities.
- ∅ Ensure the teacher knows when to call for medical help. Medical help will be required if a seizure lasts for more than 5 to 10 minutes or if another seizure begins immediately after the first without the child regaining consciousness between the seizures. This is referred to as *status epilepticus*, and it is a medical emergency.
- ∅ Discuss the side effects of all medications that your child is taking. (Ask your child's neurologist, pharmacist or your local epilepsy chapter to provide you with information regarding the side effects, and possible interactions of each drug.)
Explain to your child's teacher(s) that the side effects may impact your child's behaviour, performance and learning at school.
Also discuss any significant behaviours your child exhibits that may impact on their learning at school.
- ∅ Ask your child's teacher if arrangements could be made to have someone come in to the school to present information to the staff and students about epilepsy. Your local epilepsy chapter may be able to help you find a speaker or provide literature about epilepsy.
- ∅ Witnessing a seizure for the first time can be difficult for other students.
Provide your child's peers with information about epilepsy to help them feel more comfortable with the condition. It is also important for other students to be reassured that they can't "catch" epilepsy. Support, understanding and friendship from your child's classmates are vital to the social and emotional development of your child.
- ∅ Arrange a plan of action with your child's principal regarding what will happen when your child's teacher is away. Ensure that there will be a way of informing the supply teacher of any special instructions that they will need to follow. Should your child have a seizure, the supply teacher should be prepared to deal with the situation appropriately.

Special Education

Some children who have epilepsy may require special education services or special education programs in order to attend school and get the greatest benefit from their school experience. Children who may be considered for special education programs include children with behavioural or communication disorders, children with intellectual, physical or multiple disabilities, and children who are gifted. All children learn at different rates and in different ways. Schools must accommodate these differences by offering special education services.

A child's right to special education is protected in Ontario by provincial legislation.

Exceptional Pupils

Some students with epilepsy may need to be designated as "exceptional pupils" by their school board. The Education Act defines an exceptional pupil as "a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program...". Being identified as "exceptional pupils" entitles students to receive special education programs and special education services that are appropriate for their needs.

Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)

All school boards in Ontario are required to have in place an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). The IPRC is composed of at least three members, one of whom must be a principal or supervisory officer of the board. The IPRC is responsible for identifying “exceptional pupils”. Once a student is identified as “exceptional”, the IPRC must identify a specific area of the pupil’s exceptionality according to categories established by the provincial Ministry of Education. The IPRC must also decide on an appropriate placement for the student and review the student’s identification and placement at least once during each school year. The specific procedures for the identification and placement of exceptional pupils are set out in the Education Act.

How the IPRC Meeting Works

Parents may make a written request to their child’s principal requesting that their child be considered for special education by the IPRC. All requests must be honoured.

At least 10 days prior to the IPRC’s meeting, the chair of the IPRC will send the parents written notification of the meeting and an invitation to attend the meeting. Parents must also be provided with any information pertaining to their child (results of diagnostic assessments, summary information, etc.) that the chair of the IPRC has received. The parents should also be informed of the procedures that will be followed at the meeting. Parents and the student (if s/he is 16 years of age or older) are encouraged to take an active role and participate in the IPRC meeting. If the parents are not able to attend the meeting at the scheduled time, they should inform the principal as soon as possible. An alternate time for the meeting will be arranged or arrangements will be made for the principal to send the parents a statement of the IPRC’s decision for their consideration and signature. Parents should keep in mind that they have the right to refuse any request for a

psychological assessment of their child if one is requested by the IPRC.

At the meeting, the IPRC chairman will introduce everyone and explain the purpose of the meeting. The child’s principal or teacher will then explain to the IPRC why the child is being considered for the special education program. Parents and the student (if s/he is 16 years of age or older) are invited to ask questions and to participate in the discussion. After considering all relevant information, the IPRC will then decide whether or not to identify the child as exceptional. If the child is given that designation, the child’s exceptionality will be classified under one of the categories established by the Ministry of Education. The IPRC will also determine the most appropriate classroom placement for the child. Possible placements may include placement in a regular class with withdrawal for part of the day to receive special education services, placement in a special education class for the entire school day, placement in a special education class with partial integration into a regular class or admission to a more specialized school.

If the parents agree with the IPRC’s decision and placement, they must sign the IPRC’s statement at the meeting or take it home for consideration and return it once it is signed.

If the parents do not agree with the IPRC’s decision, they may either:

- 1 Send a written request to the school board requesting a second meeting with the IPRC to discuss the decision. This request must be made within 15 days following their receipt of the IPRC’s decision. A Special Education Appeal Board will be established to meet with the parents, discuss their concerns and rule on the IPRC’s decisions. If the parents disagree with the decision after this subsequent meeting, they may appeal it by writing to the school board within 15 days of that meeting. In their Notice of Appeal, the parents must include the decision with which they disagree and their reasons for disagreeing.
- 2 File a Notice of Appeal with the school board within 30 days of receiving the IPRC’s decision. In their Notice of Appeal, the parents must include the decision with which the parents disagree and their reasons for disagreeing.

Special Education Appeal Board

The special education Appeal Board is composed of 3 people (one of whom is selected by the parents) who have no prior knowledge of the matter under appeal. The Appeal Board meets no later than 30 days after the chair of the Appeal Board has been selected unless the parents and all Board members provide written consent to meet at a later date. The parents and the student (if s/he is over 16 years of age) are permitted to attend and participate in all discussions at the Appeal Board's meeting.

The Appeal Board must report its recommendation within 3 days of the completion of the meeting. The Appeal Board will either agree with the IPRC decision and make recommendations to implement the decision, or disagree with the IPRC decision and make an alternate recommendation to the school board regarding the student's identification as an "exceptional pupil" and/or placement.

Within 30 days of receiving the Appeal Board's written recommendation, the school board must decide what action it will take.

If the parents disagree with the decision of the Appeal Board, they may appeal to a Special Education Tribunal. Information regarding an application to the tribunal will be provided to parents with written notification of the Appeal Board's decision.

Special Education Tribunals (Ontario)
Mowat Block
15th Floor, 900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

416-325-0269
416-325-2664 fax

If the parents do not provide written consent or appeal within 30 days of the IPRC's decision, the principal may go ahead with the placement action and notify the parents of these actions.

Once the child is identified as an exceptional pupil and the parents have consented to the IPRC decision, the school board will notify the principal of the school at which the special education program is to be provided. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) will then have to be developed for the student. An annual review meeting will be held by the IPRC unless the parents have provided written notification to the principal of their child's school stating that they do not wish for a meeting to be held. If the parents or school principal

feel that the placement is not working out, they may request that a review IPRC meeting be held at any time 3 months after their child has been placed in a special education program.

If parents are unable to resolve their concerns with school board officials, they should contact their district office of the Ministry of Education for assistance. Parents and school boards who are seeking legal advice are encouraged to contact independent legal counsel.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

An IEP is a document developed for the exceptional pupil. It outlines the specific learning expectations for the student, the special education program and services that the student will receive, and the methods by which the student's progress will be reviewed.

Any student who is declared an "exceptional pupil" must have an IEP. Students who are in special education programs and/or students who are receiving special education services may also have an IEP even if they have not been identified as exceptional pupils. An IEP must be developed within 30 days of the student being placed in a special education program. It is developed by a team of education professionals after consultation with the student's parents or student him/herself (if he/she is 16 years of age or older). If the student is under 16 years of age, the principal must ensure that the parents receive a copy of the IEP and that the parents sign it. If the student is 14 years of age or older, the IEP must also include a transition plan. A transition plan considers postsecondary activities including employment, further education or community living.

The IEP is kept in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR) unless the student's parent object to this placement in writing. The IEP team should meet to update the IEP at the end of each school year or semester.

Other Important Terms

Educational Assistant (EA)

An education assistant is assigned to a classroom to assist the classroom teacher or may be assigned to directly assist a particular student. The Educational Assistant collaborates in the IEP process, helps the student as directed by the teacher, and monitors and records the student's progress.

Special Education Teacher

The Special Education Teacher collaborates in the IEP process, provides diagnostic assessments to determine the student's strengths and needs, modifies programs, provides support to the classroom teacher as needed, plans and carries out instructional programs for the student and maintains ongoing communications with the student's parents and other teachers.

Form 14

Form 14 must be completed by the parents of a student in order for information pertaining to that student to be released. When the student is involved with professionals (speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, etc.), the school board **must** have parental permission to access any assessments and the professionals **must** have parental permission in order to obtain any information pertaining to the child's educational history.

Ontario Student Record (OSR)

Every student in the Ontario school system has an OSR which contains the student's educational history. The OSR is stored securely in the child's school. The student's IEP is included in his/her OSR unless the parents object to this placement in writing. The IEP is kept in the student's OSR to ensure that all of the information pertaining to the student's medical condition and special education program is available to new teachers working with the student. The OSR follows the student until graduation. If the child transfers between schools in Ontario, their OSR goes with the child. However, if the child transfers out of province, their OSR is stored in a central file. Parents may request from the principal to see their child's OSR at any time, but it should not be removed from the school.

Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC)

Each school board has its own SEAC. They are made up of 12 seats filled by representatives of local associations, trustees and the community. A SEAC is responsible for making recommendations to its school board regarding the establishment, development and delivery of special education programs and services for exceptional pupils.

A SEAC can be a good resource for parents seeking support for their child since the representatives are familiar with the specifics of special education and how school staff work with special needs students. Parents can contact their SEAC representatives with questions pertaining to their child's education. SEAC meetings are held once per month during the school year. Parents should call the principal or superintendent of their child's school to find out more about their local SEAC and which local associations its members represent.

Special Services

Special Services include the facilities, support personnel and equipment which are required for developing and carrying out special education programs for children.