

Epilepsy and Memory (Children)

People with epilepsy often struggle with memory.

■ Strategies for Parents and Teachers

- Get the child’s attention early. Children can’t remember what they don’t pay attention to in the first place.
- Establish routines to help children know the when and where of activities.
- Keeping things in the same places will help children know where to find them.
- Help the child learn memory strategies. For example, when you teach left and right, have them hold both hands up in the shape of an L. The hand with the forward-facing L is the left one. To help them remember how to read a word with two consecutive vowels, tell them, “When two vowels go walking, the first does the talking.”
- Ask the child questions about events that encourage them to remember details. When you talk about a recent movie, for instance, ask “What was your favourite part?” or “What did the hero do?” Fill in the details if they cannot provide them.
- If the child has to memorize material, have them break the material down into manageable parts and work on the most difficult sections first.
- Find ways to relate the content you’re discussing to things the child already knows. Connect new information to the child’s own life and interests. Bring in concrete examples for the child to explore so the content becomes a meaningful part of their experience.
- Use hands-on activities. Children remember content better when they experience it for themselves.
- Use tools that best suit the child. If a child has verbal memory problems, use pictures, photographs, illustrations, videos, or diagrams. Encourage them to create images or “pictures in their head. If a child has visual memory problems, use verbal or descriptive strategies.
- Repeat information. Children remember information better if they have practice using it more frequently. Integrate lots of review in your teaching. Provide the child with activities that will allow them to practice previous information often.
- Writing things down in order to remember them is a practice called “external memory.” Teaching the child to keep an assignment notebook and a student calendar can help them remember to do things. Teach older children to use aids such as timers on watches that signal them to do specific events or to use a calendar app on tablets and smart phones.
- Children retain information better if they actively think through new information, rather than simply repeating it.

Epilepsy and Memory (Children) *continued*

■ Strategies for Teachers

- Evaluate your student's understanding of concepts in ways that do not rely solely on memory. For example, use projects and open-book tests that emphasize memorization.

Adapted from "Cognitive Deficits in Children with Epilepsy" (Mary L. Smith, Anne Gallagher, and Maryse Lassonde).

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