

Teacher Awareness: Supporting Students with Epilepsy

Section 3

Screen Text

Welcome

On-Going Support for Students With Epilepsy

The Importance of Being Informed

How to Show Support

Potential Effects of Epilepsy

Potential Effects of Epilepsy

What would you say?

Attitude, Words, and Actions

Words

Actions

Understanding Medication

Myth Busting

The Considerate Classroom

Parent Insight

The Considerate Classroom

Cognitive, Psychological, and Social Issues

Co-occurring Diagnoses

Social Interactions

Student Insight

Final Reflection

Conclusion

1 of 21

Welcome

Welcome to an interactive online course:

Teacher Awareness: Supporting Students with Epilepsy

Created by Epilepsy Ontario. Funded in part by the Government of Ontario

Start

2 of 21

On-Going Support for Students With Epilepsy

Section 3: On-going Support

The Importance of Being Informed

The challenge of living with epilepsy is not only learning to cope with unpredictable seizures but also dealing with other issues that are not covered in detail in this course— issues such as prejudices, and the fears of others who are not educated about this condition.

If you have a student in your class with epilepsy, it is important to acquire a more complete understanding of epilepsy beyond seizures.

How to Show Support

Providing seizure safety or first aid is important, but it is not the only way you can help. One of the common things that people with epilepsy need is understanding.

An inclusive attitude-be willing to learn

Thoughtful words-use modern language and dispel myths

Supportive actions -Break the silence, reduce triggers, ease recovery

Let's discuss some tips and key information.

Potential Effects of Epilepsy

Unpredictability of seizures

This is especially for students whose seizures are not controlled by medication or other treatments.

Fatigue

Fatigue can be due to nocturnal seizures, side-effects of medication, a neurological cause, or poor sleep hygiene.

Cognitive challenges

Cognitive challenges can be due to seizures, side-effects of medication, the underlying cause of their epilepsy, or a combination of these factors.

- May be episodic.
- May worsen in relation to medication changes.
- May be occur do to recent/increase in seizures.

Potential Effects of Epilepsy

Mood and behavioural disturbances

Other conditions can co-occur with epilepsy. For example, some rates of depression, anxiety and attention deficit disorder are higher among people with epilepsy than the general population.

Impact on social development

This can be due absenteeism, a co-occurring social skill disorder (such as autism), embarrassment, or a fear of epilepsy among peers. Other students are usually very supportive when they are informed and knowledgeable about epilepsy.

Effects on fine and/or gross motor skills

Can be due to the underlying neurological cause of the student's epilepsy, frequency of seizures, side-effects of medication, as well as restriction of physical activity.

- Physical activity is important and beneficial.
- Concerns about safety should be discussed with a parents/guardian or addressed by a physician.

What would you say?

Which one of these is a typical challenge for a person who lives with epilepsy?

- a) The symptoms and physical effects;
- b) The unpredictable nature of the seizures; or
- c) The strain of coping with stigmas, myths, and other people's fears.

Think about it and select the icon for our answer.

Think About it...?

All three of these things affect the life of a person living with epilepsy. Some would even say that all three are equally challenging.

This is where you can make a difference.

Attitude, Words, and Actions

Your attitude, words, and actions contribute to making that difference.

When we become more informed and prepared, our attitude becomes more relaxed and our confidence in our ability to offer support increases.

An inclusive environment also means not being afraid to invite everyone to participate in healthy activities without making any assumptions.

Words

The words that you use show support and create a respectful environment.

We have also mentioned that the commonly used names of types of seizures have changed.

You demonstrate respect and inclusiveness when you use the right language.

Thoughtful Questions:

- Can you tell me more about your experiences with your particular type of seizures?
- Do you have any side effects from medication that might have an impact on your school experience?
- How can I best help you on a daily basis?

Actions

There are also lots of things you can do, such as managing the physical environment:

- Having a quiet place for seizure recovery, or if the student is sensing they need to move to a quiet place to try to avert a seizure.
- For some types of seizures, a recovery period is needed. A quiet, comfortable place with low lighting is ideal. Arrange for someone to stay with the student during the initial recovery phase, and to check-in on them.
- Avoid certain things in your classroom and school events: bright, flashing lights or sudden, loud noises can trigger seizures and other unpleasant symptoms.
- Allow a student to retreat quietly to the library if he or she needs to get away from classroom noise.

Understanding Medication

The effects of medication are one other component of your journey to understanding.

The list of side effects can be long and may include some things you might not expect, such as feelings of anger.

If you learn as much as you can about the possible side effects, it will help you understand better some of what you may see and hear or watch the person cope with.

Some examples are:

- Dizziness,
- Drowsiness,
- Memory loss, and
- Feelings of anger.

It will also help you to understand what a student living with epilepsy may have to endure.

- The variety of tests and medical appointments can be draining.
- Changes may need to be made to their medication dosages. When that happens, seizure control and medication side-effects may initially worsen.
- The goal of treatment is to get the best seizure control with the fewest possible side-effects.

Myth Busting

Help bust some myths by learning whether these statements are true or false:
Select each one.

Epilepsy is contagious.

People with epilepsy are limited in what they can do.

For people with epilepsy, the seizures usually take the same form each time.

Sometimes a seizure can make a person mumble and wander around.

People with epilepsy take a lot of sick days.

Epilepsy is contagious.
False! There is no way to pass epilepsy on to another person.

People with epilepsy are limited in what they can do.
False! They have the same ranges of abilities as those who do not live with epilepsy.

For people with epilepsy, the seizures usually take the same form each time.
True! A person with epilepsy will have a predominant type of seizure and a proper response protocol.

Sometimes a seizure can make a person mumble and wander around.
True! Typically this is due to a complex partial seizure. Unfortunately, other people may mistake this for the effects of drugs or alcohol.

People with epilepsy take a lot of sick days.
False! While results may be different for each person, statistics show that people who live with epilepsy still use a similar range of average sick days. Often this is thanks to their healthy lifestyles.

The Considerate Classroom

You can help a person with epilepsy get the most out of their studies. Because epilepsy affects the brain, it can affect the learning process.

Accommodate varied attention spans and processing speeds by making provisions for:

- Access to alternative, quiet work areas
- Create IEPs/working with a school team
- Use of clear, explicit, and visual instructions
- Provision of regular breaks as needed
- Scheduling important and demanding activities after a break
- Presenting one activity or idea at a time
- Provision of notes in advance or use of technology to record lessons
- Time extensions for tests and assignments
- Additional means for filling in potential gaps of missed content

Parent Insight

We asked for some parent insight and advice for teachers and educators. We invite you to read their feedback.

See my child first and their medical condition second. Please treat my child with equality, dignity and respect at all times. Give my child every opportunity to reach his or her maximum potential academically, socially and emotionally.

Help end the stigma that unfortunately still exists.

Acknowledge that having seizures is a complex medical problem affecting the child 24/7 and not only when a seizure is experienced. Offer me open & frequent communication with the school and treat me as a full partner in promoting the student success. As the parent, I am an ally!

Please understand and accept the stressors on a family and a child resulting from the seizures: nature of seizures, impact on daily life, social, financial and other.

Every parent wants their child to succeed, it is possible for all. Having seizures is not a roadblock, it is only different. The student's success is a teacher's success.

Educate yourself about seizures, about the impact on the child & family. Everything looks scary/difficult until you understand it.

Information is there and many will be happy to offer it to you.

Be there for the child, understand him/her and accept, the child will give you back, you will be proud to be that child's teacher.

Keep in contact and update the parents regularly. Be flexible with expectations and work with changes in performance, as there will be unpredictable ups and downs.

Every child is unique and the nature of epilepsy reflects this. Knowing YOUR student who has epilepsy is more important than being an epilepsy expert.

Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning how to dance in the rain.

The Considerate Classroom

Can you think of other classroom considerations?

Think about it and [click here](#) to see our answer.

Think About it...?

- Providing a variety of test-taking methods.
- Allowing the student to write a test at a time that avoids medication challenges.
- Showing consideration for a student's physical needs when motor skills are temporarily affected
- Holding and participating in "Purple Day" March 26 and raising school awareness.

Cognitive, Psychological, and Social Issues

Epilepsy is a brain disorder partly characterized by the cognitive, psychological, and social consequences of the condition.

Seizures affect people differently - the condition and its consequences are unique to each individual. Students with well-controlled seizures may have different issues than those with poorly controlled seizures.

Some students living with epilepsy may be at risk for learning challenges due to the reason why the brain generates seizures in the first place, the way seizures affect the brain, and the medications they take.

Although there is no one learning profile, common issues include:

- Poor sustained attention
- Slow or inconsistent processing of information and variable responding
- Difficulties consolidating, retaining, and transferring newly learned information
- Reduced academic achievement

Co-occurring Diagnoses

ADHD, Anxiety, and Depression are among the most common co-occurring diagnoses associated with epilepsy.

These diagnoses are considerably more common in children and youth living with epilepsy than for same age peers in the general population and in children who have a non-neurological chronic illness, such as asthma.

Social Interactions

Children and youth living with epilepsy sometimes struggle with social interactions. They may feel different from their peers, be made fun of by their peers, display lower self-confidence, and have difficulty processing social information.

Taking part in social activities such as sports and clubs are keys to supporting development.

Student Insight

Three Epilepsy Ontario scholarship recipients were asked for their thoughts on what tips they would give to educators on how they can best help their students. These are students who live with epilepsy who can offer some personal insights.

Click on each image to read a contribution from each student.

Alexander Johnson

1. Students living with epilepsy have a lot "on their plate," but education is still important to them.
2. Understanding side effects of medication can help you understand the student: just one medication can have 39 side effects!
3. Work with the students and their families to help the student have the most positive learning environment possible. Understand that accommodations are requested for a valid reason, even if they may seem unusual.

Kirsten Leusink

1. Epilepsy has a wide range of effects on the brain; therefore, it's helpful to know and understand their specific students. They should not assume that a diagnosis is the same for all students.
2. Never underestimate what we can do! Students who have epilepsy are smart, too, but might need some accommodations like extra time or assisted technology.
3. Work with the student to recognize when he/she is having those rough days and find a way to work around it.

Katie Lewis

- 1 . If a student has a seizure, ask him/her if they need to rest a bit and let them if they do.
2. Be prepared to have to reteach something that students have already learned. They can't help the fact that their brains just got wiped clean of knowledge - but the memory will return.
3. Know that a child is always trying their best to learn, but they may need more time than some others and it might not come as easily. Extra time may be necessary for assignments or tests.

Final Reflection

Remember asking yourself such questions as:

- How well do I understand different types of seizures?
- What are the immediate actions I should take if a student has a seizure?
- Do I know when to call 911 for assistance?
- What types of things should I consider in helping a student with epilepsy in daily classroom life?

How would you rate your readiness now? Select a number and "next" to continue.

1 Little or no readiness

2

3

4

5 Substantial readiness

We encourage you to continue your learning journey with the resources mentioned on the final slide.

Think About it. ?

What are the key things you learned in this course? We encourage you to make some notes and share your thoughts.

21 of 21

Conclusion

Congratulations!

You have now completed the online course: Supporting Students with Epilepsy

Created by Epilepsy Ontario

For further resources to support students with epilepsy visit our site at <http://epilepsyontario.org>

Or call 1-866-EPILEPSY (1-866-374-5377)