

Teacher Awareness: Supporting Students with Epilepsy

Section 3

Audio Script

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Welcome

Welcome to an interactive online course for elementary and secondary teachers: Supporting Students with Epilepsy, created by Epilepsy Ontario.

This course has been prepared to help Ontario teachers and school personnel better understand epilepsy and the different types of seizures experienced by students in Ontario schools; how to respond in the case of a seizure happening at the school; and tips for supporting students with epilepsy in the classroom. While the course is meant to help students and personnel in schools who support them, it should not be interpreted as authoritative guidance with respect to epilepsy treatment and care.

Ongoing Support For Students with Epilepsy

In this section we will discuss how you can be supportive to a person living with epilepsy. Your support goes beyond seizure assistance. With such support, we can create an inclusive, safe, accepting environment for people with epilepsy.

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.

By being willing to learn more, you can help create an environment that is inclusive and respectful.

You can practice using the modern language of epilepsy and help dispel common myths.

You can break the silence by asking thoughtful questions, and you can offer to do things that help create a safe space, reduce seizure triggers, and ease recovery.

Let's discuss some tips and key information for ongoing support of students who live with epilepsy.

Potential Effects of Epilepsy

The unpredictability of seizures can be especially difficult for students whose seizures are not controlled by medication or other treatments.

Fatigue can be due to nocturnal seizures, side-effects of medication, a neurological cause, or other factors.

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

Cognitive challenges may be episodic. They may occur or worsen when medications are changed or the dosage is altered. Or they may occur if the student has had a recent seizure or an increased frequency of seizures.

Potential Effects of Epilepsy

Mood and behavioural disturbances can be a factor, particularly because other conditions can co-occur with epilepsy. For example, rates of depression, anxiety and attention deficit disorder are higher among people with epilepsy than the general population

Impact on social development can be due to 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 motor skills 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.

Remember that physical activity is just as important for students with epilepsy as other students and may even help reduce the frequency of seizures. If you have any concerns about a student's safety check with their parents or guardian, or get a letter from the student's health care professional.

What Would You Say?

What would be your guess as to what is most challenging for a person with epilepsy? Think about it, then click on the question icon and check your answer.

A person who lives with epilepsy lives with challenges other than just the actual seizures. The unpredictable and sometimes traumatic nature of the seizures can cause frustration and dismay. And you may be surprised to know that some will say that coping with the myths and stigmas of epilepsy is an equal or greater challenge.

This is where you can make a difference.

Think About it:

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.

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.

You can break the silence about epilepsy by asking thoughtful questions in a way that is comfortable for the student. Questions include finding out the types, symptoms, and duration of the person's seizures. You can also show your support simply by asking how to help.

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.

Words

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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. A person living with epilepsy often undergoes a variety of tests and medical appointments, which 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. Ideally, no seizures and no side-effects.

Myth Busting

Dealing with misconceptions is stressful for people living with epilepsy. It can make them lose confidence, or cause them to feel down and frustrated.

Read each statement and think about your answer. Click on the statement to see whether it is true or false.

Let's help bust some myths!

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. Teachers, educators, and study groups can 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; and
- Additional means for filling in potential gaps of missed content.

Parent Insight

No Audio

The Considerate Classroom

Can you think of other classroom considerations?

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

Cognitive, Psychological, and Social Issues

As we have discussed 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

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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.

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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.

Final Reflection

Let's take a moment to think about what you have learned.

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?

When you started this course, you were asked to rate your overall readiness on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "I have little to no awareness of how to support a student" and 5 is "I have substantial awareness of how to support a student."

How would you answer these same questions now?

We encourage you to make some notes and share your thoughts with your colleagues and other school personnel.

Conclusion

Audio Script:

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)