



Teaching and Learning

Childhood epilepsy varies in type and degree of severity and most children with uncomplicated epilepsy can have a normal, active childhood with the help of a few safety precautions.

All children should have access to the full curriculum and be encouraged to participate in social activities. Children with epilepsy should normally be subject to the usual codes of conduct which apply to their peers.

Generally, the earlier seizures begin, the more likely learning and behaviour will be affected. Parts of the child's brain continue to develop until just before adolescence, so functions performed by these developing parts may be disrupted by seizure activity.

Learning difficulties are not an automatic consequence of epilepsy. Many children with epilepsy will achieve both academically and socially. Some children will, however, experience varying degrees of learning disability and their individual needs must be identified and met by Health and Education authorities responsible for their well being.

Learning and cognitive difficulty may be directly related to:

- The epilepsy syndrome
- The type of seizure
- The duration or frequency of the seizure

- The time taken to recover from the seizure

Some children with epilepsy may experience difficulties with:

- Visual and /or verbal learning process
- Problem-solving and memory recall
- Maintaining consistency in learning
- Reading, spelling, rote learning, speech and language, perceptual problems, numeracy
- Motor ability – handwriting may be poor and performance slower
- Psycho social problems – low self esteem, frustration, anxiety and poor motivation
- Inappropriate behaviour- attention-seeking or withdrawal

Impairments or disabilities children may have include:

- A wide range of seizures from obvious tonic clonic attacks and hazardous drop seizures to subtle episodes
- Regression of areas of learning including language and memory or global loss of skills
- All of the common behavioural syndromes- depression, anxiety, ADHD, autistic spectrum disorder, obsessional behaviour and quite often challenging behaviour
- A range of problems of co-ordination

Further difficulties can be created by:

- Unrealistic expectations (above or below child's abilities) by parents, teachers and peers
- Socio-economic factors and differing family backgrounds

Anti-epileptic medication may affect:

- Attention
- Cognitive function
- Memory
- Motor skills

LEARNING STRATEGIES

The most common difficulty for students with epilepsy is problems with memory. Whether they are caused by seizures or general mental slowing from epilepsy medications, these memory problems can make learning very frustrating. Understanding these difficulties is crucial for effective learning.

Classroom strategies:

- Visual demonstrations and diagrams
- Colour-coded notes or highlighting to categorise material (name cards in different colours)
- Word associations with pictures and smells (pictures of reference)
- Mnemonic strategies: Use verbal, visual and symbolic techniques as memory aids.
- The acquisition of facts and procedural knowledge is governed by memory and the most effective measures for memory development are rehearsal-related
- Rhymes and songs (songs of reference)
- Learning to stay calm when memory blanks
- Verbal repetition: this leads to the consolidation of skills learn in mastering a task. Unconsolidated skills are not likely to be generalised to other learning tasks
- Active participation with the material that is to be remembered
- Cueing: proves effective particularly with listening activities. Warn the child ahead of time of the purpose of the activity. Knowing the purpose helps the student stay on task
- Breaking tasks down into most basic steps. Establishing teaching and learning stages that need to be achieved if the child is to succeed
- 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
- Reviewing the processes used in solving a complex task can be very helpful for the student.