

Supporting pupils with specific learning or behaviour issues

Memory

Many children with epilepsy have memory problems. All types of memory can be affected, including working memory, word recall, and long-term memory.

The following signs may indicate that a pupil is having memory problems:

- Failing to follow instructions thoroughly
- Missing out large chunks of a task or getting 'lost' in a process
- Giving up on an uncompleted task
- Having problems with sequencing
- Forgetting to bring homework or equipment
- Appearing to have a short attention span and being easily distracted
- Forgetting what they have learned in the past, even though understanding was demonstrated at the time
- Reading or writing more slowly than their peers
- Having difficulty with organising thoughts when writing
- Forgetting what they have read or not being able to answer questions on the topic
- Having problems with revising for tests
- Getting lower marks in timed tests than in general class work
- Not being able to keep up with copying from the board, or having problems taking notes when the teacher is talking
- Having difficulty with general organisation

Here are some things you can do to help:

- Repeat important information, key words or phrases frequently
- Give information in small chunks
- Present the same information in different ways – written, using pictures, recorded speech
- Break down tasks into small, manageable chunks
- Keep instructions simple and give them one at a time
- Encourage the pupil to ask you for information, if they have forgotten something
- Write down instructions for them
- Allow the pupil to use reference sheets when carrying out mathematical/practical processes, until they can remember them
- Use memory aids in the classroom – number lines, picture cards, counting devices, wall charts, lists, photos
- Encourage the pupil to take notes
- Give copies of notes if they have not had enough time to copy from the board
- Stick to routines
- Allow plenty of opportunities to go over previously learned work
- Give the pupil extra time to process information
- Use colour coding – for homework diaries, timetables, maps of the school
- Use homework diaries to write down equipment needed for the next day

- Remember that the pupil may have 'good' days and 'bad' days
- Highlight key words on the board
- Teach effective reading skills: skimming and scanning, highlighting, reading for meaning
- Use mnemonics, which involve using rhymes, pictures or sayings. For example, to remember the colours of the rainbow:
Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain
Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo Violet

Attention and concentration

Children and young people with epilepsy may have problems with attention and concentration. Issues can include hyperactivity and inattention.

Here are some strategies that might help:

- Do varied and engaging activities and consider different learning styles
- Divide tasks into small, manageable segments
- Give clear and simple instructions, one at a time
- Get the pupil's attention by saying their name, or getting eye-contact, before giving an instruction
- Give instructions in a variety of different ways – written, using pictures, recorded speech
- Repeat instructions at regular intervals
- Sit the pupil near the front of the class, away from any obvious distractions
- Use a reward system and praise them straight away for completing a task and staying focused
- Create a stimulating, but not distracting, working environment
- Make sure that you or another member of staff can see the pupil's face and reactions, to avoid missing absence seizures or loss of concentration

Speech and language difficulties

Children and young people with epilepsy may have problems with speech and language. Speech and language problems can include:

- Difficulties with speech and pronunciation
- Problems with understanding or processing speech, words or meaning
- Problems with expression
- Problems with word-finding

Here are some strategies that might help:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Use simple, short sentences and give information in small chunks
- Repeat important information, key words or phrases frequently
- Repeat and rephrase information if the pupil doesn't understand
- Be aware of your body language – make good eye contact and use hand and body gestures to communicate your message
- Make sure that the pitch of your voice goes up and down and sounds interesting
- Present the same information in different ways – written, using pictures, recorded speech
- Encourage the pupil to ask you to repeat information, or explain it in a different way, if they have not understood
- Check regularly that they have understood what has been said

Behaviour problems

Children and young people may experience problems with behaviour because of their epilepsy. The following are some general strategies for dealing with pupils with epilepsy and behaviour problems:

- Be aware of what happens to the pupil before, during and after a seizure, so you don't confuse this with difficult behaviour. You should get this information from the pupil, their parent or carer or their individual healthcare plan (if they have one)
- Support and reassure the pupil during a seizure. The pupil might have seizures that affect their feelings or behaviour, before, during or afterwards. Make sure that someone who knows how to support and reassure them stays with them
- Some pupils may have changes to behaviour because of side-effects of their epilepsy medicines. Be aware of known medicine side-effects. You should get this information from the pupil, their parents or carers or the individual health care plan. If you notice a change in their behaviour after a change to their epilepsy medicine report this to their parent or carer. If the difficult behaviour continues, the pupil's epilepsy specialist might make changes to their medicine
- If difficult behaviour is not directly related to seizure activity, deal with it in the same way as for all your pupils in line with the school behaviour policy.

Low mood and depression

Low mood and depression is common with epilepsy.

Reasons a pupil with epilepsy may experience low mood or depression include:

- Finding it difficult to come to terms with having epilepsy and feeling 'different' from their peers
- Being teased or bullied by their peers
- Being a result of having seizures
- Being a side-effect of epilepsy medicines
- Being linked to the cause of the pupil's epilepsy. For example, changes in mood are possible if a head injury or scarring is in the area of the brain that affects mood and emotions

Possible things to look out for:

- Appearing unhappy or troubled by something
- Seeming worried, fearful or helpless
- Being quiet or withdrawn, refusing to play with friends or take part in fun activities
- Having trouble concentrating
- Expressing frequent negative thoughts
- Getting poorer marks than expected
- Complaining of headaches or general aches and pains
- Appearing unmotivated or lethargic
- Having eating problems
- Crying easily
- Displaying anger or aggressive behaviour

Strategies that could help:

- Encourage and maintain as much independence as possible in school
- Give opportunities to be responsible around school
- Watch out for bullying and name-calling. Words like 'epileptic' are demeaning. Only seizures are 'epileptic'
- Give the pupil time and opportunity to talk about how they might be feeling
- Talk to the pupil and their family about whether epilepsy awareness resources could be used to help the whole class learn about and understand epilepsy