

Supporting pupils with specific learning or behaviour issues

Memory

Memory problems in epilepsy are widely reported. 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 be easily distracted
- Forgetting what has been 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 has been 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
- Do not give too much information in one go
- 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 child to ask you for information, if they have forgotten something
- Write down instructions for the child
- Allow the child 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 child to take notes
- Give copies of notes if the child has not had enough time to copy from the board
- Stick to routines
- Allow plenty of opportunities to go over previously learned work
- Give the child 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 child 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 smaller, more manageable segments
- Give clear and simple instructions, one at a time
- Get the child'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 child near the front of the class, away from any obvious distractions
- Use a reward system and praise the child straight away for completing a task and staying focused
- Create a stimulating, but not distracting, working environment
- Ensure that you or another member of staff can see the child'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 comprehending 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 does not 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 child to ask you to repeat information, or explain it in a different way, if they have not understood
- Regularly check that the child has understood what has been said

Behaviour problems

The following are some general strategies for dealing with pupils with epilepsy and behaviour problems:

- *Be seizure aware*
Be aware of what happens to the child before, during and after a seizure, so you don't confuse this with difficult behaviour. You should get this information from the child, their parent or carer or their individual healthcare plan (if they have one).
- *Support and reassure during seizures*
The child 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.
- *Be aware of medicine side-effects*
You may notice a change in the child's behaviour after a change to their epilepsy medicine. Report this to their parent or carer. If the difficult behaviour continues, the child's epilepsy specialist might make changes to their medicine.
- *Be consistent*
If difficult behaviour is not directly related to seizure activity, deal with it in the same way as for all your pupils. Make sure that you know what your school and department expects in terms of behaviour, and what standard punishments are.