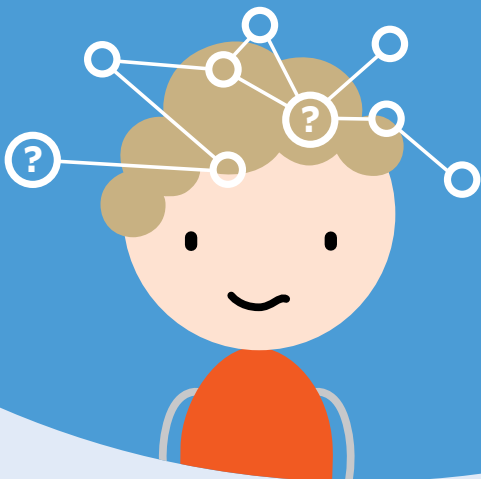


Cognitive skills and epilepsy



The impact of epilepsy is variable – some students are greatly affected while others are not.

Cognitive skills enable a person to process information, reason, remember and relate. They involve mental activities such as thinking, understanding, learning and remembering. The ability to make sense of new information is crucial to successful learning. Cognitive issues may be responsible for learning difficulties in students with epilepsy and may impact negatively on their academic outcomes and behaviour.

Possible causes of cognitive difficulties

- Seizure type, location of seizures in the brain, seizure frequency and age of seizure onset.
- Medication side effects.
- Sleep disruption due to seizures and/or seizure activity.
- Underlying neurological impairment.

Possible indicators of cognitive difficulties

- Difficulties with concentration and attention.
- Memory problems.
- Difficulties with processing new information.
- Reduced performance on tasks that have a set time limit.
- Lack of planning and organisational skills.
- Easily frustrated when completing tasks.



How teachers can help

- Discuss with the student any learning difficulties they are having, and strategies to help overcome these difficulties. This will hopefully improve learning outcomes and encourage the student to remain motivated.
- Establish a consistent classroom routine and build calming activities into your daily program, e.g. listening to music, meditation.
- Remove unnecessary distractions from the student's workspace and limit background noise.
- Ensure the student feels comfortable asking for clarification or instructions to be repeated.
- Involve the student's parents/carers in the program and if appropriate develop an Individual Learning Plan.



Strategies to try

- Limit the amount of information you present to the student both orally and in worksheet tasks.
- Use concrete language; avoid ambiguous phrases and figurative language.
- Display written instructions for a task in numbered steps and allow the student to cross off each step as it is completed.
- Provide extra time or modify tasks to allow the student to successfully complete them.
- Tune the student's attention into specific information you want them to focus on: "I'm going to read this book on volcanoes and then ask you what causes a volcano to erupt."
- If the student is agreeable have a classroom buddy to help them with instructions.

This fact sheet is part of a suite of resources that are targeted to both parents and teachers to assist students with epilepsy in the primary, secondary and special school settings.

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The information contained in this publication provides general information about epilepsy. It does not provide specific advice. Specific health and medical advice should always be obtained from a qualified health professional.

Epilepsy Foundation
587 Canterbury Road,
Surrey Hills, VIC 3127, Australia
Telephone: (03) 8809 0600

Epilepsy Infoline 1300 761 487



The Epilepsy Smart Schools Practical Guide and supporting resources provides information on how a school can embed inclusive, safe and educationally sound practices for students with epilepsy and in so doing become 'epilepsy smart'. The guide and supporting resources which can be accessed via www.epilepsysmartschools.org.au