

Behaviours and epilepsy



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

Epilepsy and behavioural issues can be related. Dealing effectively with a student with epilepsy, who also exhibits distracting or challenging behaviours requires understanding and empathy. Depending on how an individual student responds to a situation, a variety of behaviours may result. It is important to engage the student both at a cognitive and emotional level.

Possible causes of behavioural issues

- Behavioural issues may be directly linked to the student's seizure activity and/or medication or linked to an underlying neurological abnormality.
- Behavioural issues may result from deficits in memory and higher level cognitive skills due to the student's epilepsy.
- Memory difficulties can often be misinterpreted as deliberate defiance.
- Behaviour issues may emerge as the student responds to their frustration. They may stop trying in class as they anticipate further failure.
- The student may be feeling a lack of acceptance from classmates.

Possible indicators of behavioural difficulties

- Difficulty with attention and concentration.
- Impulsiveness.
- Inability to plan and organise.
- Lack of energy and motivation.
- Inappropriate attention seeking behaviour.
- Withdrawn and isolated in class/playground.



How teachers can help

If a student with epilepsy has behavioural issues it may be helpful for the teacher to follow these steps sequentially to assist in resolving the issue.

1. Identify behaviours of concern and what impact these behaviours have on the student's learning and those around them.
2. Observe and monitor the pattern of behaviours to ascertain why they are occurring.
3. Identify factors that both trigger and reinforce these behaviours.
4. Talk with the student and his/her family about the behaviour.
5. Determine what can be done to support the student's positive engagement and learning.
6. Develop a Behaviour Support Plan or Individual Learning Plan if appropriate.
7. Implement appropriate strategies that promote and recognise positive student behaviour.
8. Seek advice and assistance from the appropriate professional if required.



Strategies to try

- Focus on the student's interests and strengths to engage them in learning.
- Extend or modify learning activities as appropriate, so the student can be challenged on their own level and experience success.
- Structure tasks to allow negotiation and choices for the student.
- Allow flexibility in classroom procedures, e.g. allow extra time for completion of tasks.
- Assign the student responsibilities within classroom or broader school community.
- Develop a classroom code of conduct with your class and ensure you always explain to a student when and why a particular behaviour has breached the class code.

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.

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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