The fundamentals of self esteem are cultivated throughout childhood. This is also the time when many students develop epilepsy. For students with epilepsy developing good self esteem can be a struggle. They may have periods of increased feelings of anxiety and loss of control, due to the unpredictable nature of their epilepsy. These feelings may in turn negatively affect their self-image.

Possible causes of self esteem issues
- Epilepsy differs from many other ‘chronic’ conditions in its unpredictability. A student has no control over their seizures. This lack of control can be perceived by them as a lack of control over other parts of their lives, including their academic achievement and social development.

Possible indicators of self esteem issues
- Lack of motivation.
- Dependency on assistance in the classroom.
- Educational achievement below natural ability.
- Risk taking behaviour.
- Attention seeking behaviour.
- Difficulty forming and maintaining friendships.
Self esteem and epilepsy

How teachers can help

- Treat the student no differently from other students in your class.
- Set realistic expectations that are neither too high nor too low.
- Reinforce a sense of belonging within the class and the school.
- Encourage the student to explore and experience new situations.
- Look for authentic opportunities to encourage and praise the student.
- Be aware that epilepsy can lead to changes in ability from day to day.
- Plan and include self esteem activities within the curriculum.

Strategies to try

- Focus on the student’s interests and strengths to engage them in their learning.
- Modify learning activities so the student can experience success.
- Structure tasks to allow negotiation and choices for students.
- Try a variety of groupings to determine the situation in which the student is most at ease.
- Allow flexibility in classroom procedures, e.g. allow extra time for completion of tasks.
- Assign the student responsibilities within the classroom and the broader school community.
- Reduce the emphasis on competition in classroom activities.
- Consider educating your class about epilepsy (with the student’s consent) by using the resources on www.epilepsysmartschools.org.au

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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