



Epilepsy and Children

(School Age: 6-11 Years)

www.epilepsy.org.za

How do I tell my child about his/her seizures?

If you used a descriptive term for seizures with your child during the preschool years, it is time to shift to the accurate label. For example: "When you get dizzies, you are having a seizure".

If your child first develops seizures during this age range, start out with the accurate term. Books continue to be a very important means for sharing information about epilepsy and appropriate material can be obtained from Epilepsy South Africa.

At this stage the child's memory span for information is still developing and children learn through repetition. Books allow you and your child to return to the information and review it again and again until it is mastered.

Your doctor is also an important source of information for your child. Most pediatric neurologists will be happy to talk to your child about epilepsy. Between doctor visits keep track of your child's questions and make an "ask the doctor" list to take along to your next visit.

How do I prepare my child for a medical procedure?

A school aged child will want to know both what will occur and why the procedure is being done. This implies that you (as the parent) will firstly need to understand the "how" and "why" of medical procedures.

There are many sources of information, including your doctor, medical staff (like a nurse) working with the doctor, medical staff who will perform the procedure and Epilepsy South Africa. Once you understand what will occur, break the procedure down into a series of steps and review each step with your child. Older children will do fine with verbal

explanations. However, it will be helpful to guide them through the creation of a "checklist" to follow during the procedure to remind him/her of the steps.

For children in lower grades the checklist can be composed with pictures as well as single steps. As reading skills improve the child can identify and record a phrase or sentence for each step as the procedure is described to the child.

How do I prepare school staff?

The first step is to arrange a meeting to share information regarding your child's seizure disorder and medication with school staff.

Contact Epilepsy South Africa to find out about available material to help the school understand your child's condition. The organisation also offers epilepsy sensitisation training at schools.

While some schools are well informed, a lot of inaccurate information about epilepsy is still accepted as fact. When meeting with the school you will want to get a sense of the school's understanding of epilepsy and experience in dealing with children with the same type of seizures as your child is experiencing. If you have any questions about the accuracy of the school's information, be prepared to guide the school staff to good resources such as Epilepsy South Africa.

It is important that you establish good communication with the school. Dealing with a chronic medical condition or disability is challenging for both the school and the parents. Because this can easily become an emotional issue it is important for everyone involved to make their expectations clear at the outset. This includes your expectations as parents of the school and the school's expectations of you and your child.

Many parents promise a reward of some sort to their children for cooperation with medical procedures. Rewards can be very helpful. However, the key to rewards is keeping these small and simple. Some children have “sticker books” and add a new sticker to the collection with each medical procedure. Rewards can also be as simple as a favourite dessert after supper, verbal praise (“I am so proud of you”) or hugs.

How do I prepare my child to deal with peers?

During preschool years peers want a label for what they see and reassurance that the child with seizures is okay. During the school age years there is a need for more specific information.

Your child’s peers are likely to ask the same questions about epilepsy as your child does. Help your child to rehearse answers to these questions. You can do this through role-playing. Let your child pretend to be one of his/her friends while you pretend to be the child with epilepsy. Once you have demonstrated things your child could say, switch roles. You will now pretend to ask questions and your child will practice answering these questions.

Teasing is a normal part of life at school. Every child is teased at some stage. However, teasing can hurt a child if he/she believes what others are saying to be true or might be true. Teasing persists if the child being teased reacts to it, e.g. becoming upset, crying or striking out (physically or verbally).

Talk to your child about teasing in general before it happens. Ignoring teasing is the most effective intervention by your child to put an immediate stop to this practice. However, it is hard for children to ignore teasing if they are unprepared.

Can my child participate in sports?

Recreational and competitive sports are an important source of social activities for children. While most children with epilepsy participate in sports the range of sporting activities your child can participate in may be limited by the nature of his/her seizures and seizure control. Talk to your neurologist to identify safe sporting activities for your child and talk to your child about which of these might interest him/her. For some activities the doctor may recommend safety measures.

Can my child stay overnight with a friend?

If your child would like to go to a slumber party or spend the night with a friend you need to do a little more planning than most parents. You need to talk to the parents supervising the sleep-over to ensure that they know what to do should your child have a seizure.

If your child’s seizures are well controlled the parent will need to know that your child is being treated for epilepsy and will be bringing along medication. Depending on the child’s age you will probably want to give the medication directly to the parent rather than having your child keep it with their things. If your child’s seizures are not well controlled you will want to give the parents a written

description of the seizures, including information on what the parents need to do if your child has a seizure. You also want to make sure that the friends who will be with your child knows about his/her seizures so that they will be prepared if one occurs.

(Source/reference: Growing up with epilepsy - L Blackburn, 2003)

