



School and Parent Partnerships

Sometimes children with epilepsy must deal with more than the usual challenges associated with school. They may have learning difficulties, health issues, or social and emotional needs. In order to work towards making school as rewarding as possible for your child, it is important to promote a partnership between your family and key individuals from the school and health care team. To do so, it is important to know not only your child's needs, but also the educational policies and school, parent, and community support services, as well as, effective communication skills.

Understand your child's needs

Many different factors can affect a child's learning and development. Information about your child's needs will help to determine the appropriate type of assistance. Teachers and school staff need up-to-date and specific information about your child. Each child's experience with epilepsy is unique. Therefore, your child will have different needs than another child with a similar diagnosis. Information to provide may include:

Medical Information:

The diagnosis, seizure type(s), description, frequency, safety precautions and first aid protocols, possible triggers, and any other health concerns. Your child's doctor or neurologist may need to provide a letter for the school about the child's condition and/or to request extra support services. It is your responsibility to request this from the child's health care providers.

Educational Information:

Results from diagnostic/educational assessments (psychoeducational and/or neuropsychological) and academic evaluations (report cards, tests, and assignments). As well, information about how the child performs at home. How does the child tackle various activities? What type of a learner do you see your child being? For example, visual, auditory, or tactile? What are their strengths, challenges, likes, and dislikes?

Inform the school if there are changes in your child's condition that they should know about. These may include seizure frequency, medication, or any other pertinent issues. Update staff with medical and educational information at the beginning of each year.

The BC Epilepsy Society provides a variety of educational resources for parents, school staff, and students. These include Information Sheets on school issues and learning, classroom teaching materials, First Aid posters, DVDs, and educational workshops for teachers or students. Go to www.bcepilepsy.com for more information.

Learn about Educational Policies

As per the Ministry of Education, the goal of the BC school system is to support the intellectual development of all students, including those with special needs. Enabling all students to achieve the goals of human, social, and career development is a responsibility shared by schools, families, and the community.

A student with special needs is considered to have one or more of the following: an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural disability; a learning disability; or exceptional gifts or talents. In order to be eligible for special education programs and services, your child must meet certain diagnosing criteria through academic and medical assessments.

Some students are eligible for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This is a written document for a student that describes program adaptations or modifications for learning and/or healthcare needs. It is for children who meet the criteria for special needs or who are receiving Resource Teacher support for more than 25 hours in a school year. The IEP is developed by school personnel in conjunction with the parents.

Some students are eligible for additional assistance from the Physical Disability or the Chronic Health Impairment disability category, due to one or more of the following: nervous system impairment that impacts movement or mobility; musculoskeletal condition; and/or chronic health impairment that seriously impacts a students' education

and achievement. Students who meet these criteria must also have a current IEP and be receiving other special education services.

For more information on educational policies regarding children with special needs, please review: Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines from the Ministry of Education at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/>

Learn about Student Support Services

Student support services could include: learning assistance, counseling, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, or speech-language services. However, these may or may not be applicable to your child. Consult with the student services department of your school district to determine if your child may be eligible.

Different school districts may name or deliver their support services in slightly different ways. For information on school district services start by looking at your district website: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/bcmap.htm>

Be prepared to work to get what your child needs. It can be difficult at times to budge the system in order for it to be responsive to your child's educational needs. This "work" may be as simple as asking the teacher to give your child extra time on a test, or it may involve organizing (requesting) a formal neuropsychological assessment for your child.

In some situations a nurse will speak or meet with school staff to develop a healthcare plan and/or to provide training on administering emergency medication. In complex medical cases, a Nursing Support Services representative will be assigned to work with the school, child, and parent.

Learn about Parent and Community Support Services

Seek advice from people with experience. Other parents can provide ideas that could help guide you through the school system, even if their child's issues are different than yours. Community and government organizations can provide contacts to parents and information about support services and educational policies. Some organizations you may wish to contact include:

- BC Federation of Parent Advisory Councils 604-687-4433 www.bccpac.bc.ca

A non-profit organization that advocates for the best possible education for all children in BC, through the active involvement of parents.

- Federation of Independent School Associations 604-684-6023 www.fisabc.ca

An umbrella organization for independent schools in BC. Acts as a liaison between the schools, government, and other educational institutions.

- Learning Disabilities Association 604-873-8139 www.ldac-taac.ca

Provides programs and services including tutoring, advocacy, and education about learning disabilities.

- Family Support Institute 604-540-8374 www.familysupportbc.com

Provides support and advocacy for families of people with disabilities, as well as resources, information, and workshops.

- BC Association for Community Living 604-777-9100 www.bcacl.org

For individuals with developmental disabilities. Many regional chapters provide information on issues such as transition to adult services and school supports.

- Community Living BC 604-664-0101 www.communitylivingbc.ca

Delivers support and services to individuals with special needs and their families. This includes transition planning to adult services. Works in conjunction with the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development 250-952-6044 www.gov.bc.ca/mcf/

Services include a range of child, youth, and family focused support programs and interventions to help promote children's healthy development, maximize quality of life, assist families in their role as primary caregivers, and support full participation in community life.

Communicate Effectively

Effective communication and negotiation skills are necessary to resolve any concerns. It is important to:

- Be respectful and professional.
- Arrange an appointment.
- Write down your questions, goals, and priorities.
- Stay focused on the relevant issues.
- Be assertive and convey self-confidence.
- Manage your choice of words, temperament, and body language.
- Treat professionals as partners.

Organize copies of school information in a binder or file folders. Include the names and titles of school personnel, notes and dates of meetings and conversations, and any other material you feel is relevant. Some examples of strategies for effective school meetings and documentation are here: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/advo.index.htm>

To promote school and parent partnerships, it is also important to:

Stay Informed of Your Child's Progress

The needs of children with epilepsy change over time. Different developmental stages require different approaches. Flexibility is important. Meeting and speaking with school staff throughout the school year will help to address these changing needs. Some parents find that keeping a "communication book" (a notebook that goes to and from school each day with the student) is helpful to keep a teacher and parent informed of the student's condition and activities.

Discuss any issues or concerns that arise immediately and work together with the school to find the best possible solution. If your child is falling behind in school, make arrangements as soon as possible for evaluation, testing, and extra help (such as tutoring) as necessary.

Plan for Transitions

Plan well ahead for transitions to kindergarten, middle, secondary, and post secondary school. This could start a year or more in advance. It ensures that any necessary support services will be in place when the child begins the school year, and will allow the supporting documentation to be ready for IEP planning. Sample documents on transition planning, including timelines, and checklists:

Transition to Kindergarten: www.kidsnewwest.ca/family/school_pdfs/Tranisition%20to%20School%20Workbook.pdf

Transition to Secondary and Post-Secondary: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/pdf/support_guide.pdf

Get involved with the school

Your participation benefits the entire school community. It also gives you the opportunity to develop relationships with other parents and students. Involvement could mean attending school events and activities, volunteering, or joining the parent advisory council. Encourage your child to participate in extra curricular school activities.

Support Your Child's Learning at Home

This reinforces what the child has learned and helps to develop effective study habits. This could mean assisting with homework, reading a story before bed, or playing with flashcards or games to help memorize different concepts. Provide consistent expectations for behaviour and school performance. Structure is important for children in learning, especially when a child requires extra support. Involving your child in various recreational and educational activities or outings is also valuable. Many community centres and services offer free or low-cost activities that can supplement a child's educational and social development.

Working Together

Parents are the child's first teachers. They have the primary responsibility for their care and well-being. Therefore, you need to ensure that your child's rights, needs, and opinions are respected.

The support required from school personnel will depend on the child's age and stage of development, the severity and frequency of seizures, and whether there are any cognitive or behavioural difficulties.

Working in co-operation with school personnel and your child will not only promote academic achievement, but can foster self-esteem and independence that will benefit your child in the future.

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You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all the program and service benefits.

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