



EDUCATE ME  
INCLUDE ME

# Learning conversations about epilepsy

A parent/guardian and teachers resource

## Epilepsy and its possible impacts on learning

**An iceberg analogy** is a good way to show how the possible impacts of epilepsy can often be far greater than the seizure itself. Just as only the tip of an iceberg can be seen above the surface of the ocean, with epilepsy the actual seizure itself can often be easily seen but many of the other possible impacts of the seizure may be hidden from view. These impacts are not necessarily present for all children, and indeed may change over the duration of a child's life.

**THIS IS WHAT OTHERS USUALLY SEE WHEN A PERSON HAS EPILEPSY**

**SEIZURES**

Below are some of the other possible impacts of epilepsy that people may experience because of their seizures and which can often impact a person more than the seizure itself.

- MEMORY:** For some people with epilepsy, memory can be a significant challenge
- STIGMA:** A person can experience stigma due to a lack of community awareness and understanding of epilepsy
- TIREDFNESS/FATIGUE:** Due to seizure activity (including during sleep) people can be tired and find it difficult to concentrate
- MEDICATION:** Side effects from medication may cause tiredness, difficulties with concentration or mood/behaviour changes
- SELF-ESTEEM:** The unpredictable nature of seizures can have a negative effect on a person's confidence and self-esteem
- DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY:** Up to 50% of people living with epilepsy experience depression or other mental health illnesses

## Why are learning conversations important?

The impact of epilepsy on a child and their family is often far greater than the seizure itself. This resource aims to educate both parents/guardians and teachers about what the possible impacts may be and provides a practical way to start a learning conversation.

## What are the benefits of understanding the impact epilepsy may have on a child's learning?

- If epilepsy is impacting a child's learning, strategies can be developed and put in place to support the child to achieve
- If there are learning difficulties, the sooner they are identified the better the chance of improving a child's learning outcomes
- If a child is constantly frustrated because they are not achieving success in a specific area, it can lead to a lack of motivation to learn, behavioural difficulties and may affect their self-esteem and social interactions

## How can this learning conversations resource be used?

1. The parent/guardian should complete the checklist printed inside this resource using personal observations of their child in their home environment.
2. If the often response has been frequently ticked, this is an indicator that the child may be having difficulties in an area which could also be negatively impacting on their learning at school.
3. Parent/s should request an interview with their child's teacher and take the completed checklist along to assist in discussing their concerns.
4. An important outcome from this initial discussion will be to decide if further support needs to be put in place for the child.

**Note:** Just because the often response may be selected in the checklist, this does not necessarily mean there is a difficulty. This could simply reflect a developmental stage of the child and a conversation with the teacher may assist in better understanding expectations.

# Use this checklist to identify areas of concern you may have in regard to your child

*Read the indicators listed for each area and tick the box that you feel best describes your child. If your child never displays a behaviour just tick not often.*

Do you have concerns about your child's	How often do you notice the following about your child:	Not often	Sometimes	Often
<b>Concentration</b>	• is very tired			
	• does not appear to be listening			
	• is easily distracted			
	• is slow at finishing things			
<b>Memory</b>	• continually losing things			
	• has difficulty recalling events			
	• can have difficulty remembering directions			
	• can have difficulty following conversations			
<b>Cognitive skills – thinking skills that make learning possible</b>	• slow response time when asked to do things			
	• difficulty following more than one instruction at a time			
	• slower to grasp new ideas and ways of doing things			
	• can become easily frustrated when completing a task			
<b>Executive functions – these are the skills that a person uses to plan and organise</b>	• avoids tasks that require effort			
	• has poor time management skills			
	• can act impulsively without first considering possible consequences			
	• can overreact emotionally to situations			
<b>Confidence</b>	• needs a lot of encouragement to participate in new activities			
	• often asks for help with things they are able to do themselves			
	• finds it difficult to make and/or maintain friendships			
	• appears anxious and/or withdrawn			

Other observations about your child:

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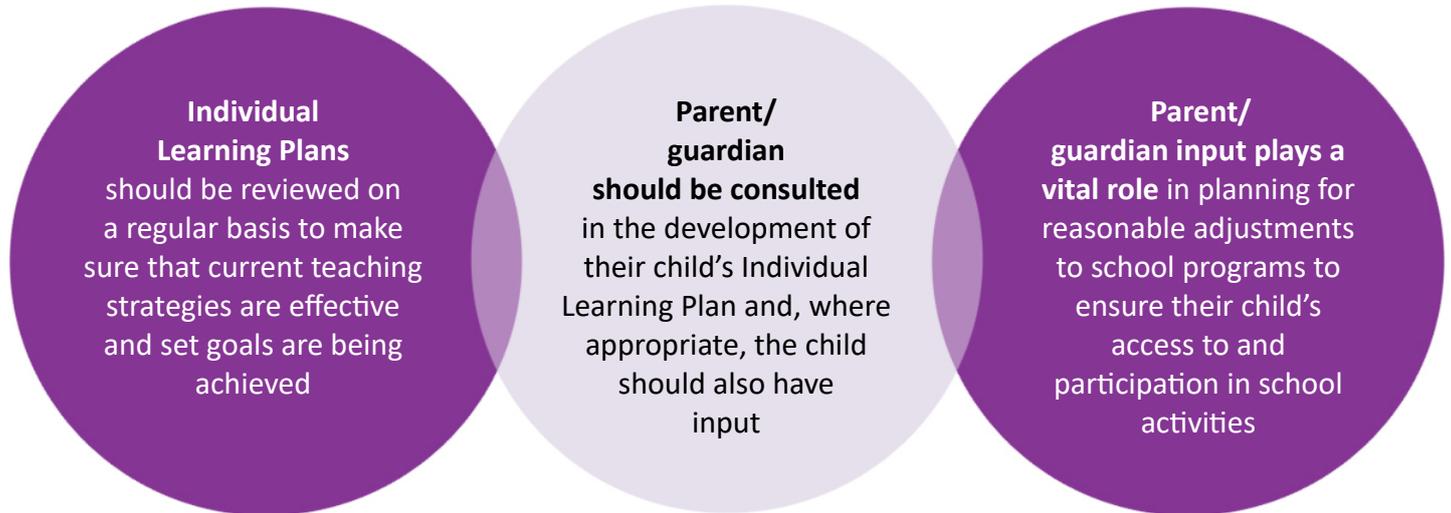
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## Individual Learning Plan

An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is developed by the school to address the educational needs of a child. The plan is based on an assessment of a child's learning and sets out the child's strengths and needs. Specifically an Individualised Learning Plan:

- Identifies the child's areas of strength and preferred learning style, and accommodates their cultural identity

- Lists the skills the child has already gained in relation to a desired goal
- Lists short term goals that are both measurable and achievable in an agreed time frame
- Describes the teaching strategies developed to support the child in achieving these goals



### Key professionals who can provide support in improving learning outcomes for students living with epilepsy

#### Paediatric Epileptologists

specialise in the diagnosis, treatment and management of epilepsy in children.

**Psychologists** provide assessment, intervention and counselling services to help young people with psychological or social issues.

**Clinical Neuropsychologists** have advanced skills in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of a range of disorders.

Their skills are underpinned by knowledge of brain structure, function and dysfunction, and the effects of multiple factors on cognitive, behavioural and emotional functioning.

There are a limited number of specialist neuropsychologists that specialise in the area of paediatric epilepsy.

**Occupational Therapists** identify any safety risks in a child's environment and can also work with children to improve their sensory, physical, academic, social and emotional capabilities.

**Speech Pathologists** typically assess and treat people who have a communication difficulty. This includes all aspects of communication including speech, writing and reading (language disorders).

Epilepsy New Zealand can provide resources and 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 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  
NEW ZEALAND**  
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