



Epilepsy Inclusion and Education

www.epilepsy.org.za

Inclusion of persons with disabilities is a vision of schools and other places of learning underpinned by the following beliefs:

- All people can learn.
- People who learn in different ways and at different rates can learn alongside and from each other.
- We all have strengths and weaknesses and experience barriers to effective learning at times.
- A child with a disability or learning difficulty has the right to attend a school close to his/her home in the company of his/her siblings and friends.
- Inclusion will create a more tolerant and caring society where people with disabilities are empowered to do meaningful work and lead independent lives based on their abilities.
- Many learners are handicapped not by their disabilities or difficulties, but by the inflexible system in which they are forced to live and learn.

Why inclusive education?

Traditionally children with disabilities were placed in separate special schools. While such schools often offer highly qualified teachers and specialised programmes, children tend to become segregated from their neighbourhood, peers and the opportunity to interact and participate within mainstream society.

What is needed to make inclusive education work?

- Full commitment to the philosophy of inclusion.
- A culture of caring and respect towards every person in the school.
- Creative and flexible teachers.
- A team of social needs advisors able to support specific schools and teachers as required.
- Parents who participate and are actively involved.
- A flexible curriculum that meets the needs of all children.
- Assessments that focus on the strengths and specific needs of children with epilepsy rather than their disability or perceived deficiencies.

What are the rights of persons with epilepsy to access inclusive education? Section 5 of the SA Schools Act (1996) as amended from time to time states that:

- A public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way.
- The governing body of a public school may not administer any test related to the admission of a learner to a public school, or direct/authorise the school principal or any other person to administer such a test.
- In determining the placement of a learner with special education needs the Head of Department and principal must take into account the rights and wishes of the parents of such learner.
- If an application for admission is refused, the Head of Department must inform the parent in writing of such refusal and the reason.
- Any learner or parent of a learner refused admission to a public school may appeal against the decision to the Member of the Executive Council.

Education White Paper 6 (2001) commits the South African education authorities to building an inclusive education and training system and makes provision for:

- Strengthening education support services at district level and in schools;
- Strengthening existing special schools and broadening their role to become resource centers offering support services to “regular” schools;
- The “piloting” and creation of “full service schools which include learners with mild to moderate disabilities”; and
- Developing the capacity of teachers in terms of curriculum development and assessment.

What should you do as a parent?

- Speak to parents of other children with similar disabilities to find out about their experiences and suggestions regarding schools, recommendations, etc.
- Make an appointment with the principal of your local/ chosen school.
- Prepare your child for the interview and take your child with you to the appointment with the principal.
- Know your rights. If necessary, contact Epilepsy South Africa to support you.
- Outline your child’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as your expectations regarding educational goals/ social stimulation.
- Ask what support your child can expect from the school and outline what support you can offer.
- If you encounter any problems contact the office of the Department of Basic Education in your area and as for their support.

Myths regarding epilepsy and education

Many people believe that children with epilepsy:

- Have lower intellectual abilities than their peers;
- Need to attend special schools;
- Are unable to learn;
- Cannot cope with subjects such as mathematics and science;
- Will miss too much school due to seizures and therefore won’t cope with academic requirements.

The impact of epilepsy on behaviour and emotional development

It is important to know that psychological and social problems are often more significant than the condition itself. This is mainly due to societal ignorance, fear and stigmatisation causing distress.

Epilepsy in the classroom: Tips for the teacher

Teachers need knowledge about epilepsy, what to do in the case of a seizure, how to record seizure activity (times, duration and types), recognising pre-seizure signals, seizure triggers and the medication a child takes (including being alert for possible side effects).

Do's	Don't
Accept the child as an individual.	Rush in to help unless the child needs it.
Foster a culture of acceptance in the classroom.	Restrict the activities of the rest of the class because of the child with epilepsy.
Ensure that you and all the learners receive adequate epilepsy training.	Treat the child with epilepsy differently from other children.
Encourage participation in activities that improve the child's self-image.	Allow the child with epilepsy to think of him/herself as an invalid.
Support the child and help him/her to develop confidence to deal with different situations.	Allow the child with epilepsy to use his/her condition as an excuse to avoid difficult situations (e.g. not completing homework/ assignments).
Concentrate on what the child can do rather than what he/ she can't do.	Be afraid to involve colleagues, parents and medical professionals in your classroom management.

Tips for parents

- Arrange a meeting with your child’s class teacher as soon as your child is placed at the school.
- Explain epilepsy as a condition and be willing to train other learners and staff about epilepsy. Focus on the handling of seizures, triggers and types of seizures and stress that epilepsy is not contagious.
- State what you expect, but also what you are willing to contribute.
- Provide all the required information about your child’s medication and obtain the teacher’s commitment to administer medication as required.
- Explain that feedback will be forwarded to the medical professionals to assist with decisions regarding the child’s medical management.
- Show the teacher how to complete your child’s seizure diary.
- Ask that your child be treated exactly the same as all other learners.

