

Language and epilepsy



The impact of epilepsy is variable – some students are greatly affected while others are not.

Most students living with epilepsy progress well academically. However the specific nature of an individual student's epilepsy may have a direct bearing on their learning. Factors that need to be taken into consideration are the type of epilepsy, its cause and the brain regions affected. The left temporal and parietal lobe areas of the brain are critical for reading and language development.

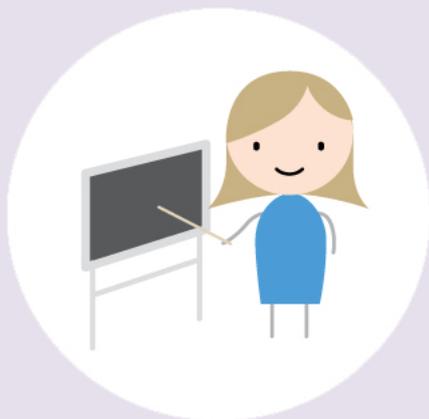
Possible causes of language difficulties

- As speech and language are controlled on the left hemisphere of the brain, students who experience focal seizures in this hemisphere may exhibit a specific pattern of language difficulties.
This might be the reverse for students who are left handed
- Medication prescribed to control seizures may impair a student's concentration, memory or language skills.

Possible indicators of language difficulties

- Memory problems.
- Poor concentration an/or inattentiveness
- Reading and/or comprehension difficulties.
- Phonemic awareness and/or spelling difficulties.
- Difficulty remembering instructions.
- Difficulty following instructions.

How teachers can help



- Ensure there is open communication between you, the parents and support staff.
- Ensure classroom activities cater for a range of learning styles, e.g. visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.
- Identify and utilise the student's strengths to build on any area in need of development.
- Scaffold learning by modeling a task rather than just explaining the expectations of a task.
- Allow the student to work with a peer to help him/her to follow and understand instructions.
- Be aware that epilepsy can lead to changes in ability from day to day.
- An Individual Learning Plan should be considered to support his or her language development.



Strategies to try

- Explain the purpose of an activity prior to starting. This will assist the student in identifying relevant information for the task requirements and in maintaining their attention.
- At the end of a task it is often helpful to review, with the student, processes by which problems involved were solved.
- Repeat an experience in order to consolidate some of the skills learned in mastering a task.
- Use graphic organisers to help construct meaning from text and focus on specific concepts contained in the text.
- Wherever possible have instructions written and displayed, in addition to giving them verbally.



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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. Special thanks to Dr Silvana Micallef, Snr Clinical Neuropsychologist, Austin Health, for her help in compiling this fact sheet.

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.

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