

PARENTING CHILDREN WITH EPILEPSY

How can I create self esteem in my child?

Focus on what children with epilepsy can do, enjoy doing, and do well instead of what they cannot do. Friendships should be encouraged and maintained. Parents should communicate openly and honestly with their children, allowing them to ask questions about their condition to prevent any shameful or embarrassed feelings from developing.

Can my child have friends?

Yes, friendships and social contact are encouraged. It is important to understand that overprotection and excessive concern by parents of children with epilepsy may isolate them, causing children to withdraw and reduce social activity.

How can I create normalcy in my child's life?

Teach your child that feelings of being different are something many children experience. Parents must also balance their children's need to be independent with the need to keep them safe. They should be encouraged to participate in safe activities they enjoy. Children with epilepsy should still be disciplined.

Can my child play any games or sports?

Yes, sports participation and exercise are beneficial and encouraged unless your neurologist recommends otherwise. In general, school sports activities and gym class should be open to all children, including children with seizures. Safety measures such as adult supervision should reduce risk for injury should a seizure occur. Wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle, or for sports where head injury is possible, should also reduce risk for injury.

Can she go to school like other children?

Yes! The school should be notified that your child has epilepsy so that they will not be surprised if a seizure occurs. If your child needs medication administered during school hours, a permission slip and instructions may be necessary.

Is there any activity my child is not allowed to do?

Children with epilepsy should NEVER bathe without constant supervision. Older children should take showers. All children should be supervised while swimming or near water. Risk for injury is also present near traffic, on elevated structures, or in any setting in which sudden loss of awareness could be dangerous.

Will my child ever be seizure free?

Many children experience seizure freedom on anti-epileptic medication therapy and some types of epilepsy are outgrown. Your child's neurologist should be able to provide you with information regarding the possibility of this depending on the type of epilepsy your child has.

Who should I inform about her seizures?

School teachers, school nurses, babysitters/care-providers, lifeguards, swimming instructors, coaches, as well as friends and family members.

How can I help her siblings to have connection with her?

It is not uncommon for siblings to feel resentment towards children with epilepsy based on the amount of attention epileptic children may receive from their parents. Alternatively, siblings might feel at fault or fear they too will develop seizures. Parents should encourage siblings to discuss their feelings openly. Sibling support groups may also provide an opportunity for feelings to be discussed and support provided. It is important parents demonstrate and reinforce attention and caring feelings towards all their children.

How can I talk to my child and her siblings about her seizures?

Parents should communicate openly and honestly. Children may have misconceptions and should be provided opportunity to ask questions or address fears.

Can my child go to epilepsy summer camp?

Yes, attendance at an epilepsy camp is encouraged. Information about epilepsy camps can be found at the Epilepsy Foundation of Virginia web site: www.EFVA.org or at the national Epilepsy Foundation web site: <http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/epilepsyusa/camp2006.cfm>

Can my child have mental retardation associated with her seizures?

Seizures do not cause mental retardation. However, many brain conditions that cause seizures also cause mental retardation which can vary from mild to severe. Developmental assessment and evaluation of school performance should be performed in children with epilepsy to determine whether cognitive and learning problems are present.

Can my child have behavioral issues or mental health problems because of her seizures?

Behavioral and mental health issues, including attention deficit disorder alone or with hyperactivity, depression, anxiety and negative behaviors can occur in patients with epilepsy. Medications and behavioral therapy can be helpful to address and treat these issues. Often, psychiatrists or psychologists are the best health care providers for these problems.

Can my child have learning problems?

Yes, learning difficulties can be associated with epilepsy. Issues with learning range from mild to severe depending on diagnosis, age of seizure onset and seizure control. Some antiepileptic medications can also impact a child's ability to learn. Educators, families and medical providers should work together to address your child's specific needs.