

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH EPILEPSY IN SCHOOL

What Is Epilepsy?

- Epilepsy is a neurological (brain) disorder that causes repeated seizures.^{1,14}
- Seizures occur due to unusual activity in the brain.^{1,14}
- Seizures can affect¹:
 - movement
 - awareness
 - behavior
 - sensations
- Not all seizures include convulsions (uncontrollable muscle spasms). Some may look like^{1,14}:
 - “blank stares”
 - confusion
 - brief loss of awareness
- About 1% of children in the U.S. have epilepsy or seizure disorders.³

Mental Health and Behavioral Risks

Children with epilepsy are at higher risk for mental health conditions.

9-49% have symptoms of anxiety⁵

31% qualify for mental health disorders⁶

12.5% with new seizures have mental health conditions⁷

Overall, 30-50% of children with epilepsy develop behavioral or mental health disorders, such as ADHD, anxiety, or depression.⁸

Some students may also have:

learning disabilities or developmental challenges.⁹

lower self-confidence²

worries about having a seizure at school²

worries about how peers would react²

Impact on Learning

More than half of children with epilepsy say it affects their learning.⁴

Students may experience:

- trouble paying attention and staying focused^{2,4,10}
- memory difficulties^{2,4}
- slower thinking and processing^{2,4}
- tiredness after seizures or from medication^{2,4}
- missed lessons because of seizures or recovery time^{2,4}

These challenges can lead to lower academic performance.^{2,4}

Medicines used to control seizures can also affect learning. Possible side effects include:

- feeling very tired or low energy^{2,4}
- irritability or mood changes^{2,4}
- difficulty with attention or memory^{2,4}



Common Myths About Epilepsy

Misconceptions about epilepsy can lead to stigma and unsafe responses.

- ❌ **Myth:** All seizures involve convulsions (uncontrollable muscle spasms).
- ✅ **Fact:** Some seizures involve staring or confusion instead of convulsions.^{1,2,11}
- ❌ **Myth:** A person can swallow their tongue during a seizure.
- ✅ **Fact:** This is impossible. Putting objects in the mouth can cause harm.^{11,12}
- ❌ **Myth:** A person should be restrained during a seizure.
- ✅ **Fact:** Restraint can cause harm. Instead, protect the person from hazards.^{11,13}
- ❌ **Myth:** Epilepsy is a mental illness.
- ✅ **Fact:** Epilepsy is a neurological (brain) condition.¹
- ❌ **Myth:** Students with epilepsy cannot participate in school activities.
- ✅ **Fact:** Most students can safely participate when seizures are managed properly.^{2,14}



What To Do During a Seizure

Teachers should follow the student's **Seizure Action Plan**.¹³

- ✅ If a student has a seizure¹³:
 1. Stay calm and remain with the student
 2. Move nearby objects away
 3. Turn the student on their side if possible
 4. Time how long the seizure lasts
 5. Follow the seizure action plan
- ❌ Do NOT restrain the student or place objects in their mouth.^{12,13}
- 🚨 Call emergency services if¹³:
 - the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes
 - seizures happen again without recovery
 - the student is injured or has trouble breathing

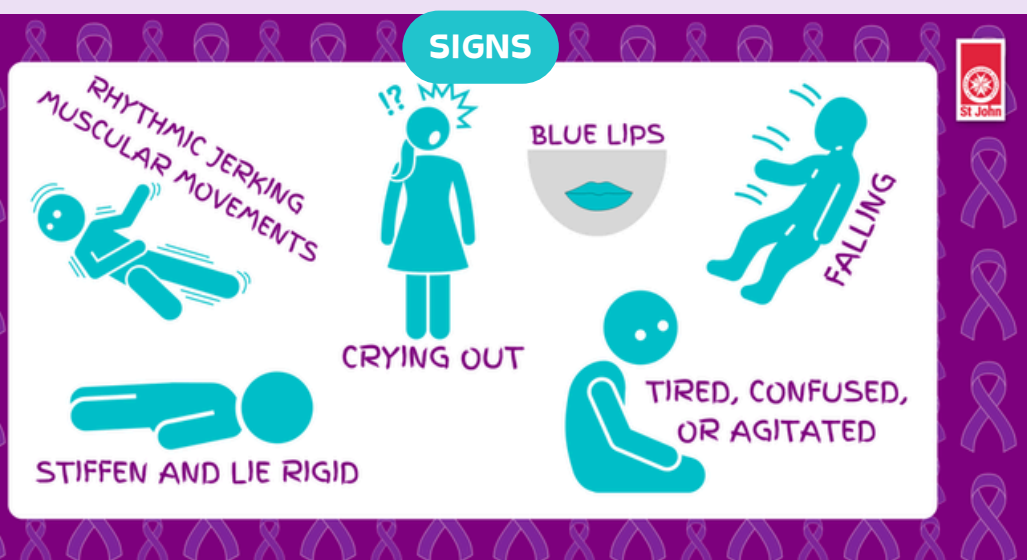


Image courtesy of St. John Ambulance Victoria, Australia¹⁵

How Teachers Can Support Students

Collaboration With Families²

- Work with parents, nurses, and doctors
- Follow the Seizure Action Plan
- Watch for changes in: attention, behavior, & learning

Academic Supports²

- extra time
- flexible tests
- shorter tasks

Social and Emotional Support²

- teach classmates about epilepsy
- build empathy
- avoid unnecessary limits

Instructional Strategies²

- simple instructions
- slower pace
- repeat key ideas
- use visuals

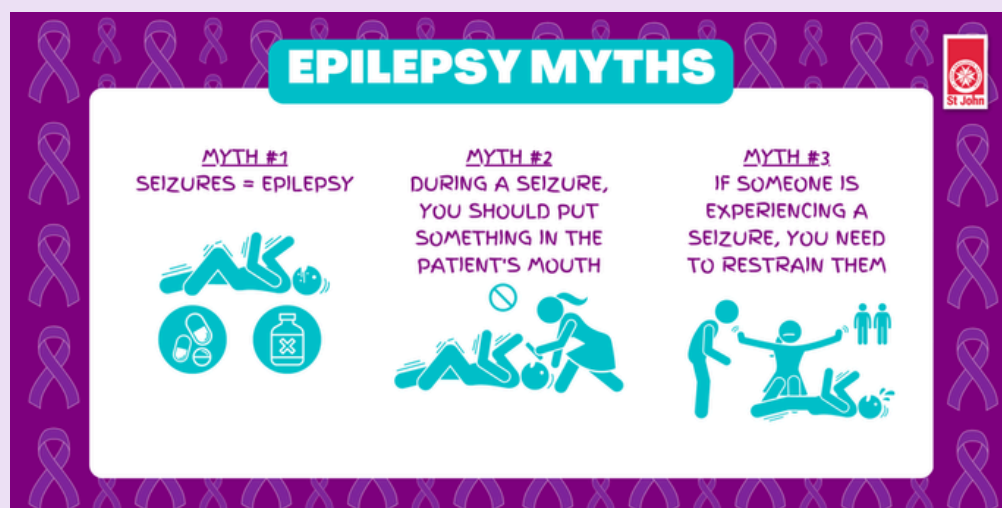


Image courtesy of St. John Ambulance Victoria, Australia¹⁵

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For more information on how to support students with epilepsy, visit the Epilepsy Foundation at www.epilepsy.com