



FACTSHEET



Inclusive
Education
SOUTH AFRICA

INCLUDING LEARNERS WITH EPILEPSY in a mainstream setting

1 WHAT IS EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy is a neurological condition characterised by unusual electrical activity in the brain causing unprovoked seizures. When there is a sudden excessive electrical discharge that disrupts the normal activity of the nerve cells, a seizure may result.

EPILEPSY IS NOT:

- An intellectual, psychological or physical disability needing specialised education
- A condition requiring different or special treatment, only good management
- A contagious disease
- Punishment for some wrong-doing or crime
- Possession by an evil spirit

CAUSES OF EPILEPSY

- In most cases the cause of epilepsy is unknown (idiopathic epilepsy).
- In the remaining cases the underlying cause(s) (symptomatic epilepsy) could include:
 - Head or birth injury
 - Alcohol and drug abuse
 - Ageing
 - Metabolic or biochemical disturbances or imbalance.

TREATMENTS

Most commonly used is anti- seizure medication but there are cases where surgery can be effective. More alternative therapies such as diet and supplements are sometimes used but are not common or supported by research.

EPILEPSY IS GENERALLY DIVIDED AS FOLLOWS:

- **Generalised seizures:** when the excessive electrical activity encompasses the entire brain during which the person may jerk, fall down and lose consciousness.
- **Partial seizures:** when the excessive electrical activity is limited to one area in the brain and person may appear confused or distracted, make repetitive movements

2 EPILEPSY STATISTICS

Epilepsy affects 1 in every 100 people in South Africa, i.e. approximately half a million South Africans based on a total estimated population of 52 million. Including family members, at least another 2 million South Africans are affected by the condition. Up to 80% of people with epilepsy will be able to control their seizures with medication.

3 INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Traditionally children with disabilities were placed in separate special schools where they tend to become segregated from their neighbourhood, peers and the opportunity to interact and participate within mainstream society. A child with a disability or experiencing a barrier to learning has the right to attend a school close to his/her home in the company of his/her siblings and friends.

4 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.
- **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 in a variety of ways and to develop the capacity of teachers in terms of inclusive teaching practice and differentiated curriculum development and assessment

5 WHAT WILL FACILITATE THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH EPILEPSY?

- A whole school commitment to the philosophy of inclusion with creative and flexible teachers
- The awareness that psychological and social problems, due to societal ignorance, fear and stigmatisation are often much more significant than the condition itself
- Assessments that focus on the strengths and specific needs of children with epilepsy rather than their disability or perceived deficiencies
- Specialist training in all aspects of epilepsy

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- ▶ Accept the child as a child first and foremost and not only a child with epilepsy
- ▶ Foster a culture of acceptance and inclusion by the rest of the class by explaining the condition clearly and dispelling fear
- ▶ Support the child and help him/her to develop confidence to deal with different situations, do not make exceptions for her
- ▶ Concentrate on what the child can do rather than what he/ she can't do – this builds confidence
- ▶ Maintain close contact with the parents and hear all their concerns but share all the child's successes!

RESOURCES

- ▶ Epilepsy South Africa 0860 EPILEPSY (0860 374 537) | info@epilepsy.org.za
- ▶ Henry Ford Health System
- ▶ Inclusive Education South Africa



Epilepsy has not stood in the way of achievement for people like Jonty Rhodes, Vusi Mahlasela, Agatha Christie or Prince.

Epilepsy South Africa

You may not see it hear it or smell it, but I have epilepsy! And no, it is not contagious!

The Fresh Quotes

"There's nothing more debilitating about a disability than the way people treat you over it."

Solange Nicole

Tips

- ▶ **Parents:** Arrange for a meeting with the teacher to share all important information as soon as your child starts school
- ▶ **Parents:** Avoid known and common seizure triggers: stress, missed medication, lack of sleep, infrequently flashing lights

FOR MORE INFORMATION

CONTACT

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For more information about the *Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Education* project: vvoeb.be/southafrica

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