

Helping Students Who Have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

When teaching adolescents or younger children with CFS, it can be helpful to understand the problems faced by these students. A key to helping students with CFS is to work as a team with their teachers, parents, administrators, other education professionals, and healthcare professionals. This team approach can provide flexibility with educational plans and school resources that are customized to target and reflect the student's needs



CFS affects each student differently is a complex illness affecting the brain and immune system. It is characterised by neurological, gastrointestinal and musculoskeletal symptoms, pain and disabling fatigue. It is a chronic disease which can result in major disruption to educational, social, physical and emotional development for many months or years. Each child may experience different symptoms and the duration of their symptoms may differ as well. Symptoms can fluctuate from day to day and week to week, affecting a young person's ability to attend school regularly and perform consistently.

CFS can affect children and adolescents in many ways, including their:

- Attendance
- Ability to participate both inside and outside of the classroom
- Relationships with peers
- Ability to complete work and
- Overall school success

Understand How CFS Affects Students Inside and Outside the Classroom

Students with CFS are often very keen to return to school but become easily exhausted. Because children differ so much in the severity and range of their symptoms, it is important to discuss individual cases with parents. By doing so, schools will be able to utilise a student's strengths and be aware of his or her particular situation.

- School performance or attendance can be affected by a student's CFS symptoms, such as memory or concentration problems, unrefreshing sleep, and headaches.
- Adolescents and younger children with CFS can experience problems when trying to do several things at once—for example, doing their homework and keeping track of time; understanding and flexibility are essential.
- Many children with CFS experience more severe symptoms in the morning hours and may have trouble getting to school on time or staying alert in the morning at school.

- Children with CFS can have problems with attention, response time, information processing speed, and delayed recall of verbal and visual information.
- Teachers may notice that students with symptoms mentioned above may be able to complete grade-level tasks, but might require more time to do so.

Tips for Teachers and Coordinators

Because CFS is a complex disorder that affects how students learn and participate in school, teachers and Coordinators may want to be creative in developing strategies to foster an encouraging learning environment for their students with CFS. Schools can assist students with CFS in the following ways:

- clarify essential learning tasks and give clear boundaries about which tasks need not be done;
- arrange for missed work, notes, school newsletters and so on, to be made available for easy collection (e.g. a folder in the front office);
- tape important lessons;
- make educational videos or audiotapes available;
- ensure that all staff are aware of student's limitations, particularly in relation to exercise and sport, and the need for rest;
- minimise administrative requirements (e.g. presenting notes for being late);
- trust the student to know his or her limitations -discuss any concerns with parents;
- provision of quiet, well-ventilated rest area, ideally separate from infected students in sick-bay area;
- recognise difficulties with mobility presented by widely-spaced school facilities, stairs, etc.

*NOTE: The list above is not exhaustive. Teachers and Coordinators may need to explore other strategies to accommodate the particular needs of each individual student with CFS

Information sourced from:

Dr Sabine Hennel - VPRS MCH

<http://www.ahmf.org/education.html>

<http://www.chronicillness.org.au/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/me-cfs>