

Enabling young people with a spinal cord injury to return to school may have some physical and emotional challenges.

Every member of the school staff will be involved with the returning child.

The whole school needs to have clear aims and mechanisms in place to help these young people and their families/carers.



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short stay school



### **IF THE YOUNG PERSON HAS LIMITED HAND MOVEMENT**

- Encourage them to listen to the lesson and ask a friend or the teacher for notes
- Use a laptop computer with a roller-ball mouse and voice-activated software like Dragon
- Encourage them to record only key words in class
- Help them to record what they need to do for homework (write notes or use a Dictaphone)
- Apply for additional arrangements in all exams.

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## GOING BACK TO SCHOOL



SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE RETURNING TO SCHOOL WITH SPINAL CORD INJURY:

**A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS**

## PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

- Consider the accessibility of all areas of your school. Look at suitable door widths, desk heights, lifts, ramps, distances between buildings and accessible toilets. If the school needs to be made accessible consider changing classrooms or the timetable to allow access
- All staff need to be aware of the emergency exit plan for wheelchair users in case of fire as does the young person
- The young person will need flexibility with the school uniform to ensure that suitable clothes and shoes are worn. This will avoid pressure sores as the skin breaks down more easily after a spinal cord injury. They will also require a place to store clothes and supplies and have access to a changing room in the event that a change of clothing is needed
- If this young person is at risk of Autonomic Dysreflexia information on the condition will be sent by the NSIC. All school staff should be aware of the signs of this condition and a copy of the management plan be available to all staff
- Particular times of day might present more of a problem for a young person with spinal cord injury (for example large crowds at the start and end of lessons and at lunchtime) Be aware of the difficulty of negotiating crowds; however leaving class 5 minutes early to avoid navigating through crowded hallways may mean missing out on homework tasks and risk the young person feeling singled out and socially isolated
- Carrying books on the back of the wheelchair is best avoided. Can text books be accessed via the internet? Two sets of text books are also useful, one at school and one at home.
- If the young person needs medication during the school day a plan is required to ensure the child can obtain this and what assistance is needed
- Spinal cord injury alters the regulation of body temperature so the young person may need an extra layer of clothing with them. They also need to keep drinking throughout the day and will need to have water with them
- If the young person needs to stand in a standing frame or have a physiotherapy session at school consider where to store the frame and what time it is best to stand /have physio ensuring the least possible impact on Education and socialising
- Seek medical advice if you need it from the Spinal Injuries Out Patients Department at Stoke Mandeville Hospital
- Make sure there are enough disabled parking spaces at school and arrange for accessible school transport
- Consider provision for inclusion on school trips and at after school clubs and in practical lessons eg Food Technology, Science and Design Technology

# GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

Supporting young people returning to school with spinal cord injury: a guide for schools

## EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

- Returning to school for many spinally injured young people is an unsettling time as they continue to cope with what has happened to them, their physical needs and an altered body image. The process is often helped by school staff and friends visiting the hospital, sending cards or keeping in touch by email
- Meeting prior to discharge from hospital involving the young person, family and professionals helps ease the transition back to school
- Visits to the school together with the Occupational Therapist help re-establish friendships and sort out accessibility issues
- Information about Spinal Cord Injury and preparation for other children and the whole school community make settling in easier. However the decision about what to say and how to say it needs to be taken together with the young person and family.
- Promoting independence can also be determined by the willingness of your school to be flexible and consider each situation based on individual circumstances. Perhaps you might consider allowing the young person to have a mobile phone in case of emergencies, they would be able to move freely around school use the lift and toilet without assistance
- Ensure school staff know what has been agreed with the family in terms of uniform, leaving the classroom, phased return and attendance, in class support, drinking, and taking part in PE and practical lessons
- Consider offering additional support to help the young person prioritise catching up. Keep under review with the young person and parents/carers if the work is too hard, too easy, too little or too much
- Maintaining relationships for the young person at after a spinal cord injury and time spent in hospital may be challenging and needs the support of the whole school community in promoting disability and inclusion
- Partnerships between parents and school work well when there is good communication and both parents and school are open and receptive to learning and sharing information. It is useful to have a named contact in school for the young person and family/carers
- Physically disabled young people will need additional specialist information about further education and future careers from Connexions

- Some young people require access to ongoing emotional support and this should be considered if school behaviour is changing. This could include school counselling services, Educational Psychologist, CAMHS, contacting parents/carers to raise concerns and encouragement given to local counselling provision
- Be aware of the stress experienced by siblings. This might manifest itself in a number of ways: anxiety, low mood, angry outbursts, resentment and poor learning ability through reduced concentration and attention
- Remind and empower the young person to ask for help when they need it and to explain what they know, they have been through a lot!

## IN THE CLASSROOM

- If a Teaching Assistant is employed it's important that there are clear boundaries and the TA understands when to leave the pupil on their own. The young person needs to socialise with friends independently and it's important that the TA is able to take gradual steps to give the young person more freedom. Ensure this relationship is kept under review
- Height adjustable desks might suit some young people but others find they feel singled out by this. Discuss the individual equipment needs of the young person with them
- Where to sit in the classroom and with whom matters to the young person, consider not always having them at the front or by the door and be aware of the importance of not sitting your pupil next to a radiator
- Laptops, memory sticks and access to a printer often help reduce the need for carrying books around

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- To access PE lessons adapted equipment and accessible play areas, fields and gyms are needed. PE teachers need to ask advice and receive training about how disabled young people can access PE lessons and have activities suited to their needs. They also need funding for specialist equipment
- Consider how the young person is going to participate in swimming lessons. Look at the changing facilities, hoist and transport arrangements
- Think about organising demonstrations of wheelchair sports for the school
- Be aware of the emotional need for privacy when changing for PE