

1. Learning takes place in the classroom. You've got to be there!

ATTENDANCE. Often when a student has a health need that requires extra attention, he/she will miss class. This might be due to illness, clinic appointments, surgery, or downtime as a result of equipment failure or maintenance.

It is important to stress to doctors and to technical repair staff that some of these issues can be handled on non-school days or after-school. Students need to be aware of the school schedule, vacation days or early dismissal times, class tests, state-wide testing, competency exams, end-of-the-quarter tests, or mid-terms. Also, know when school sporting or social events are planned. Work around these events when scheduling appointments as much as possible. Absenteeism and tardiness at school will be greatly reduced. It is common sense, but sometimes we need a reminder that we *do* have control over our time and how we spend it.

DOCTOR APPOINTMENTS. Consider scheduling your doctor appointments for after-school hours. Have the "block-out dates" written down when you call for an appointment so that you can explain up-front the dates and times you need to avoid.

Many times the person who schedules appointments is used to being the one in control (it is easier and takes less time on the phone), so develop a rapport by saying what you need (a certain appointment time) and the reason why (you do not want to miss learning time.) There may need to be some flexibility, but if you make these "well check-up" visits in advance, it's easier for the clinic to accommodate your requests.

KEEP EVERYTHING WORKING! Try to do regular maintenance on wheelchairs, van ramps, batteries, and other medical devices to avoid missing school due to mechanical failures. Prevention works wonders to keep you from hassles and breakdowns.

PERSONAL NEEDS. Another issue that takes students away from the classroom is bathroom time, especially if the student needs assistance. Talk with your doctor about ways to help regulate bathroom times—to increase bladder control and implement a bowel management program at home, before or after school. Bathroom visits that are 10 minutes here and 20 minutes there add up at the end of the day. If you chart the time that is spent out of the classroom on non-learning activities, you may be amazed how many minutes are lost each day. Think about why personal needs might be time-consuming—socializing with aides or peers, physical effort, and support all take time. Learning to care for personal needs efficiently will be helpful later in the employment setting.

EATING ON THE RUN. In many school cafeterias, that's exactly what it might feel like. There are only so many minutes in a school schedule and getting to and from the cafeteria takes time. This takes away from a relaxing lunchtime and being with friends. Students deserve to be able to socialize with their peers without adult aides present.

Ask your doctor or a nutritionist about having a liquid "power drink" instead of the traditional lunch food. And of course, fruits and vegetables are a must! Trouble chewing? Try fruit smoothies or minced vegetables in soup via straw.

2. Health & Wellness are Critical

THINKING & LEARNING. If you are not well you can not think well, and you will not be in school learning. You may not be able to participate in life's activities. Students with known medical issues sometimes need accommodations in the school setting. Being able to "fit in" and not be seen as different is important.

Think ahead about issues that may interfere with learning and socializing. Find ways to minimize problems, by asking mentors or trusted others for advice.

STAMINA. Have you and your educational team reviewed your class schedule to ensure there is enough time and less distance in changing classes to avoid being fatigued?

Is homework geared toward mastery learning rather than quantity of exercises that may be too labor-intensive to complete? Example: Instead of doing a page of multiple math problems, the student is assigned to complete 10 with an accuracy rate of at least 80%. The point here is whether the student has learned the lesson and can demonstrate the skill.

Are these types of time-efficiency skills being taught to students can better assess situations and make smarter choices?

MEDICATION. Do you, your friends, and selected teachers know what medications you are using and the side effects? Do they know to whom they should report unusual behavior, i.e., behavior that may be caused from a drug side effect or that may indicate a health problem? Has an effort been made to not schedule medication times during school?

STAY IN THE KNOW. Students should create and carry with them a one-page portable medical summary to share with new medical providers and school personnel (without violating the student's privacy).

While schools have emergency forms for students, the one-page portable medical summary can help in providing care in the emergency room. Also, students should carry their insurance cards or a photocopy of it with them at ALL times.

HEALTH STATUS. What does wellness look like when someone has a chronic health condition? What behavior and moods are due to hormones, depression, or change in health? It is important that staff members who will be around the student be advised what "usual" behavior is for that student and report when something seems a little off. A student who suddenly starts falling asleep in the classroom may not be bored, and but may be having a problem with oxygen intake.

Friends can also be part of the circle of support. (i.e. Friends of a student who has diabetes often carry sugar candy to assist their friend when their sugar is low, and in some cases have permission to obtain a beverage that may help their friend avoid a serious episode.)

Teachers do not need to be in a crisis mode when a student has a chronic health issue, but it is good for them to be observant, be informed, and do what they can for the student to avoid a serious health problem - and - also know when to get help if needed.

2. Health & Wellness are Critical (con't.)

HYGIENE. Wash your hands. This really does work to cut down on infection by preventing spread of germs. Many times students do not have the opportunity to wash their hands before they eat. Encouraging this easy-to-implement habit can help keep a classroom healthy.

Healthy bodies look good and smell good. It is important to keep hair, teeth, and the body clean. This may require some skill development from the occupational therapist and physical therapist.

3. Pro-active Wellness Keeps You in School - and Later on the Job!

FLU SHOT. Check with your doctor to see if you should have an annual flu shot or periodic pneumococcal vaccination.

VITAMINS. Check with your doctor about what kinds and dosage of vitamins to take. Being a student and keeping up with activities requires a lot of energy!

BE INFORMED. Learn as much as you can about your medications (dosage and time to take them), your health, and problems to avoid in order to maintain and sustain your periods of wellness.

Students who have difficulty reading can learn how to identify their prescription bottles, certain words or letters, or their names on the labels.

4. Live Each Day!

PERSON FIRST. Everyone needs and deserves to be a person first—someone who has friends and is a member of the community, and someone who gets to have fun. This is no less true for people with serious illnesses or disabilities than it is for anyone else.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS. None of us knows how long we will be on this earth. Some students who have life-threatening health or disability issues may have a shorter time. Each day is a day in its own right—not a time of mourning or a Disney World, either.

Students with special health care needs will appreciate being treated like any other student. Even though there may be times that will be intense, both emotionally and physically, this is all part of the package. It is important that rules and consequences apply to ALL students.

FRIENDSHIPS ARE LIFESAVERS. It is critical that students have friends. All students need to feel connected. Encourage inclusive activities whenever possible. Seek learning experiences that foster positive relationships.

Recognize the importance of social skills, exhibiting age-appropriate behavior, and that some communication is acceptable for the classroom and some only for peer dialogue.

If medical issues or equipment appear to be a barrier to participation, identify ways to neutralize the problem.

4. Live Each Day! (con't.)

BEING THERE WHEN YOU CAN NOT BE THERE. There will be unavoidable times when students will not be in the classroom.

There are simple techniques that will help students stay connected, these include:

- 1) using NCR notebook paper, for example, so that a fellow student can take notes to give to the absent student later,
- 2) daily email from different classmates will also help the student to keep in touch and up to speed on schoolwork and
- 3) during "homebound" instruction times, phone calls, email, or using a speakerphone during class times can be helpful.

When things change and the health situation becomes more serious, honesty (without jeopardizing the student's privacy) is important.

Students with serious health issues sometimes have many ups and downs during the course of their lives and yet they may manage to rally and return to school and their normal activities. Terminal does not mean tomorrow – live each day to the fullest!

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