Factsheet

Recommended teaching strategies for pupils with a brain tumour
Working wonders for children with brain conditions

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Thank you.
Recommended teaching strategies for pupils with a brain tumour

This factsheet gives information on how a school can assist a pupil with a brain tumour. In particular it pinpoints a number of different strategies to use as memory and cognition in some, but not all, pupils with a brain tumour can be seriously affected by their treatment.

Key points

- What common problems arise following radiotherapy?
- How can the school prepare for the pupils return?
- What arrangements can be made within the classroom?
- What strategies can be put in place to help with memory techniques?
- What different teaching strategies can help the pupil?

What common problems arise following radiotherapy?

- Poorer than previously expected academic performance.
- Memory and information retrieval.
- Reading and comprehension.
- Vocabulary and syntax.
- Understanding concepts.
- Understanding symbols, columns and graphs.
- Following instructions.
- Sequencing.
- Attention span – memory problems can be difficult to distinguish from attention lapses; often both exist and they can exacerbate each other.
- Concentration and impulsiveness.
- Planning and organisation skills.
- Social skills and maturity.
- Working at a very slow pace.
- Spelling and handwriting.
- Frustration with the learning process.
How can the school prepare for the pupil’s return?

- Be realistic about expectations – a pupils’ workload and deadline may need to adjusted following their return to school after treatment, reduce number of subjects studied to reduce burden.
- Ensure there is regular communication which provides both academic and emotional support and measure the pupil’s progress – reassure the pupil as it can be frightening not being able to remember things. Appoint a key liaison member of staff the family are comfortable with.
- Expect delays in milestones and monitor difficulties in academic and social settings.
- Arrange a meeting with the pupil’s parents, teachers, teaching assistant, SENCO to discuss realistic expectations and what is observed in class.
- Develop a personalised guide/individual learning plan for the pupil.
- Consider setting up EHC plan.
- Allow extra time for tasks and examinations - usually a minimum of 25% with breaks.
- Follow set routines.

What arrangements can be made within the classroom?

- Adapt the classroom/school environment – put essential information on a notice board and ensure the pupil checks this every day.
- Have one special place to keep important things e.g. a folder, their drawer or desk.
- Ensure work can be done in a book or is filed into a folder to avoid loose sheets being lost.
- Provide as much information as possible in a visual or written form to reduce demands on the child’s memories or provide handouts and lesson plans.

What strategies can be put in place to help with memory techniques?

- Teach memory strategies e.g. mnemonics, mental imagery, mind maps – but check how useful the pupils find them as they can become an extra burden.
- Have a homework diary and check that it’s been completed properly before the pupil goes home.
- Use spider diagrams to help organise thoughts.
- Tell the pupil specifically what to do or repeat instructions. Give instructions in the right sequence and one step at a time.
- Provide a checklist for the pupil to follow.
- Use cues or triggers to help the pupil recall information – their memory system may be disorganised and they may not be able to locate the information they require.
- Encourage and teach effective note taking as an aid to poor memory.
- Allow time for repetition, get the pupil to repeat information back to you.
- Review what has been covered at the end of each lesson and the beginning of the next lesson.
- Use pictures or colour prompters to aid memory e.g. using the same colour sheet for a particular subject.
- Encourage pupils to use a notebook they keep with them as an external memory aid, with daily ‘to do’ section, and encourage them to take notes/dictate to cue remembering.
- Combine several strategies to make a substitute ‘memory system’ - assess whether written/ oral or pictorial information is retained more easily.

**What different teaching strategies can help the pupil?**

- Use multiple choice questions as some pupils may find it easier to recognise the correct answer rather than recalling it freely.
- Use write-on sheets for work to increase focus.
- Use scaffolding techniques e.g. essay structure with examples.
- Try to link the new learning to the pupil’s previous knowledge and experience.
- Teach numeracy skills and concepts in small steps with real life examples.
- Break down text into small, structured steps.
- Provide positive, specific feedback.
- Model the activity with the pupil to give them experience of the objectives.
- Apply strategies you already use creatively; ie for a pupil with attention problems use ADHD techniques, use ASD techniques for children with social and communication problems, use dyslexia strategies for pupils with reading/writing processing.
Further information

Full information on this topic is available in Returning to School – “A Teachers’ guide for pupils with brain tumours, during and after treatment” 2nd edition (2014) by Dr Lesley Edwards, Dr Lynley Marshall and Gabriella Haeems of the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust in collaboration with Cerebra.

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