

# Let's Talk About...

## Spina bifida: Information for teachers

Many children with spina bifida have learning problems, which can make school a challenge. However, you and your student's parents can work together to create a positive learning environment. Here are suggestions for teaching a student with spina bifida.



### How can I help my student improve seeing, moving, and understanding skills?

Sometimes children with spina bifida struggle with seeing objects and understanding the relationships between them. For example, they might have trouble putting a puzzle together or seeing the differences between shapes. They may also struggle with seeing an object and coordinating a movement, like copying instructions from the blackboard.

As a teacher, you can help your student work around these difficulties in the following ways:

- Reduce the amount of written work required:
  - Allow your student to write in a workbook.
  - Do not require them to copy notes or problems.
- Have another student copy notes using carbonless paper. Then give the copy to your student.
- Allow your student to tell someone their answers or write answers using incomplete sentences.
- Emphasize readable handwriting over neat handwriting.
- Increase or eliminate time limits on tests.
- Teach your student to use computers and calculators.

These adjustments will help your student with spina bifida spend about the same amount of time on assignments as the other students.

### How can I improve my student's reading and verbal understanding?

- Keep verbal explanations and instructions brief. Make sure your student understands all instructions.
- Have your student use the following questions to guide their reading:
  - Who are the main characters?
  - What is happening (the plot of the story, the sequence of events)?
  - Where does the story occur (place)?
  - When does the story occur (year, day, season, and length of time)?
  - Why are the characters doing what they are doing (reasons)?
  - How are the characters doing what they are doing (tools, transportation, technology)?
- Teach your student to look at subject headings, underlined words, italicized words, and bolded words when reading textbooks.

## How can I help my student pay attention?

- If your student struggles with paying attention, work with the school psychologist to set up an attention improvement program.
- Break tasks into small parts and give your student one part at a time.
- Provide a place to work that is free of distractions.
- Establish a secret signal that reminds your student to get back to task (such as a tap on the shoulder).

## How can I help improve my student's memory skills?

- Have the school psychologist formally evaluate your student's memory skills.
- If your student qualifies for speech therapy, ask the school's speech therapist to teach them methods to improve memory.
- Use open-book tests when appropriate.
- Help your student remember important tasks by using alarms or timers.

## How can I help my student with organizational skills?

- Establish individualized education program (IEP) goals to improve organizational skills.
- Teach your student how to organize belongings. Then prompt them to keep organized until it becomes a habit.
- Help your student set daily and weekly routines for tasks like putting their backpack away in the same place every day.
- Provide visual schedules and checklists to help your student keep track of various tasks.
- Have a counselor or teacher monitor your student's performance in all classes. Ensure that others have made classroom and homework adjustments for your student, as needed.

- Have older students take a study skills class to learn about organizing, test taking, note taking, and outlining.
- If needed, have older students take a supervised study class, where a teacher or teacher's aide assists them with homework.

## How can I help my student develop good problem-solving and reasoning skills?

- Encourage your student to solve problems on their own. Teach them the following steps to solve a problem:
  - Identify the problem
  - List all possible solutions
  - List possible consequences to the possible solutions
  - Choose the best strategy to solve the problem
- Form cooperative learning groups so your student learns to work with others to solve problems.

## How can I help my student develop good social skills?

- Enroll your student in a social skills training group at school.
- Give your student feedback on inappropriate social behaviors and provide alternative positive behaviors.
- Reinforce your students appropriate social behaviors.

## Notes

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