

Supporting Young People with Persistent Pain in School

Information for Staff

A caring and friendly school environment, with staff with positive and compassionate attitudes, will make a big difference for a young person with persistent pain. The key is an ethos of inclusion so that a young person with persistent pain can be supported to reach their full potential.

What is pain?

Pain is described as 'an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or perceived tissue damage'. Studies indicate that 15-30% of children experience persistent or recurrent pain during childhood, with 8% of children reporting severe and frequent pain.

When pain becomes persistent:

Persistent pain is when pain has been present for more than three months. Treatment is aimed at improving coping strategies and reducing the impact of pain on everyday life, rather than looking for a cure or using multiple medications.

Persistent pain is not a sign that your pupil is doing any damage to their body. Avoiding physical activity for prolonged periods is known to be detrimental, leading to loss of muscle strength and fitness, increased fatigue and feelings of frustration and hopelessness.

Therapy is delivered by a variety of practitioners that work together; including physiotherapists, clinical psychologists and occupational therapists, as well as specialist pain nurses and doctors.

Ways to cope effectively with pain:

- Psychological strategies e.g. distraction, relaxation, or helpful ways of thinking about the pain.
- Pain relieving techniques e.g. heat/cold packs, massage, stretching, TENs machine.

Reducing the impact of pain:

- Improving routine, sleep and appetite
- Treating anxiety, low mood, frustration
- Managing other stresses

Some of the challenges faced in school:

- Effects of pain on concentration
- Effects of pain on energy levels
- Effects of pain on fitness and mobility
- Missed lessons due to pain flares or appointments
- Medication needs and side effects
- Effects of pain on establishing a peer group

The Child Planning Meeting:

It is useful to arrange a Child Planning Meeting (CPM) to collaborate on how to provide your pupil with the best opportunity to participate fully in school life. A member of our team would be happy to attend this meeting.

Some points to consider at the CPM:

What does your pupil need to have a positive school experience?

- Advocate a graded build-up of activity and participation in both the classroom and PE
- Encourage your pupil to attempt all tasks and modify the activity to allow as much participation as possible.

Work out a ‘bad day’ plan, e.g. allowing your pupil to utilise a quiet area for study rather than the classroom, meet with a guidance counsellor or stay in during breaks.

Confidentiality:

- Ensure your pupil’s wishes are understood
- Make a plan to inform class group if appropriate

Can any physical adaptations be made?

- Consider issuing a lift pass if appropriate
- Consider providing a locker for books
- Consider providing a second set of books to reduce the need to carry heavy books home
- Alternative seating/desk set ups
- i-Pad/adapted laptop rather than pen and paper

Set up a ‘buddy’ system with other classmates to help them catch up on any missed work.

Exam arrangements

Goal setting:

- Work with your pupil to set some meaningful and achievable physical, social and academic goals
- Consideration of appropriate career advice

Local Resources:

Additional Support for Learning Service:

- Four groups for young people in Edinburgh and are called Youth 180.
- They are staffed by two teachers and focus on Literacy, Numeracy and HWB targets.
- Most of the young people are out of school but remain on the school roll.