



When a Child with Serious Illness is Your Student

With a variety of treatment advances available, a majority of children diagnosed with many serious or life threatening illnesses today will go on to enjoy full and productive lives. The crucial element that ensures education will remain a focal point for these young people is a close working relationship among families, school personnel, and the hospital team. Together, the team can support the adjustment that students make as they return to the classroom.

Tips for School Staff:

1. Request that the hospital liaison send you necessary information about the child's illness and treatment that may impact the child's learning and/or school life. It is helpful if the hospital team can be available to answer any questions.
2. When you know what the treatment plan is you will have an idea about the frequency of absenteeism the child will experience. Many children who are ill will have good days and bad days. It is important for the kids not to feel left out of what the class is doing. However, it is most important for you to think creatively about what is most important. By prioritizing assignments and reducing the amount of homework, you will enable both the hospital tutor and the home-based tutor (when one is needed) to focus on the most important content.
3. Stay connected with the child's family and do not be afraid to call them so that you can hear about their concerns and talk about your ideas for helping their child stay connected with their classmates and their schoolwork.
4. It is important to let classmates know about the illness their classmate has. It is important to be honest, yet developmentally appropriate. You can suggest ways for classmates to stay connected with the child: sending cards, making a video, sending pictures, making a planned visit to the hospital or home, sending e-mails, or calling from school. If you would like support in planning what to say to your students, contact the hospital liaison.
5. Before the child returns to school, meet with the family and the student to talk about issues, concerns and strategies for making any required modifications.
6. Prepare classmates for changes they will observe when their classmate returns to school. Things such as weight gain or loss, hair loss, or the loss of a leg or an eye will create questions in the minds of your students. Encourage the children to ask questions as they learn about these changes. It is essential that they understand how painful teasing is and that it will NOT be allowed.
7. When a child returns to the classroom, it is important to know what expectations to have. The hospital team can offer some guidance. It is common to find students needing

periodic rest breaks, frequent drinks, snacks, and increased bathroom privileges. Some children will be moody as a result of medications.

8. Have genuine expectations of the child. Encourage class participation and continue to make sure that the essentials of the curriculum are the focus of instruction. One of the most important aspects of a child's return is interaction with peers.

9. Stay in close contact with the school nurse and alert him or her to any changes you observe in the child, or to infectious disease that is in your classroom. (This is especially true for chicken pox.)

10. If you are the main contact between school and the child's family, be sure to provide the information they want shared to special area teachers, substitutes, and ANYONE that the child may interact with,. Consistent and accurate information can help folks stay informed and keep rumors from occurring.

Information adapted from: The Center for Children's Cancer and Blood Disorders