



STARTING SCHOOL

A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE

Purpose of this resource:

To provide information and tips which will act as a guideline to identify and meet the challenges of school for a child with congenital heart disease. There are 18 different types of congenital heart defects, however many of these have additional anatomical variations. Each person with a congenital heart condition will have different treatments, medications and health care plans specific to them. It is important to discuss your child's condition with their school and teacher, medical practitioner/cardiologist.

Starting the conversation with teachers:

Engage in an open discussion with your child's teacher about your child's condition. Learn about the school's health care plan. Each school will have their own templates.

Provide them with as much information as possible. You are your child's advocate.

Some points to mention;

- Specific behaviours
- What your child can do physically and academically
- What would be their usual appearance and what may be of concern (e.g. cyanosis)
- Provide guidelines for daily care and emergency care
- Provide the opportunity for your cardiac nurse or medical professional to meet with your child's teacher and the school staff if need be.

Some points you may need to be aware of;

- Does the school have stairs or lifts?
- Is there air conditioning in the classroom/s?
- Is anyone else at the school aware of your child's capability e.g. sibling?
- Understand the level of competence the teacher has with your child's condition
- Does the teacher have first aid training?
- Ensure information is passed onto relief or substitute teachers
- Are there any school activities your child may not have the ability to participate in?

You should provide clarity to the teacher and school as to the type of congenital heart condition your child has. If the cardiac nurse or medical professional cannot meet with school staff, then a letter can be provided outlining their restrictions – if any.

This discussion can take place prior to or at the beginning of the year, however it would also be advisable to have ongoing and regular communication with the school and the classroom teacher.

Managing communication and expectations

Collaborating and developing a good relationship with your child's school and teacher will deliver the best education and social outcome for your child.

Keep an open line of communication with the teacher and school.

- Update them on any changes with their condition, attitudes and behaviour or home environment.
- Keep teachers up to date with changes in contact information.
- Keep up to date with their class/school progress.
- Discuss the benefits of telling their peers. This can create an inclusive and supportive environment.
- Discuss medications and changes in medications.
- Inform them of any future surgeries/procedures that may cause absence from school.
- Update health care and emergency plans.



STARTING SCHOOL

A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE continued

Acknowledge and be understanding;

- Teachers have more than one child in their classroom.
- Volunteer or be involved in the classroom whenever possible.
- A teacher's level of knowledge regarding your child's daily needs will be different to yours. You are living with your child and are vigilant in their monitoring.
- Your teacher needs time to get to know your child's intricacies and recognise the signs of symptoms or distress.
- Get to know all teachers involved with your child's care.

School excursions

Every school will have their own health care and emergency plans. They should prepare a risk assessment for each excursion.

As a parent, you can enable your child to have a safe and enjoyable experience, by ensuring the following:

Provide any extra medication or provisions needed.

- Ensure safe storage of medications.
- Supply information of nearest hospital.
- Provide an aid/carer or peer support if needed.
- Volunteer for excursion (if your child is happy with this arrangement – this will change as they get older).
- Ensure all areas at the venue are easily accessible and manageable for your child – not too physically challenging.

Important elements for teachers/educators to consider

- Acknowledgment of the person's condition is essential, however recognise and focus on their ability as a student.
- Social inclusion is important for all children including a child living with congenital heart disease.
- Interaction with peers should be encouraged e.g. group work.
- Provide non-physical activities (if necessary) when encouraging play with friends.
- Be inclusive and provide alternative opportunities if the class activity is too physical/strenuous.
- Gain consent from parents when sharing medical information.
- Ensure all teachers are notified and are aware of the students care plan.
- Listen to the student when they say they are not feeling well or need to rest.
- Listen to parents' concerns.



STARTING SCHOOL A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE continued

Other topics of interest

- Distance education and special needs
www.goodschools.com.au
- Social Inclusion
www.cyda.org.au/literature_164402/Belonging_and_Connection_-_2014_WORD
- Social development
<https://learningprogram.rmhc.org.au/teachers/helping-their-social-development.php#teaching-strategies-establishing-guidelines>
www.bcchildrens.ca/Heart-Centre-Site/Documents/HeartChapter705.pdf

Other links and resources

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/en/pages/default.aspx>
https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/CPR_Vol14No3_PS_SchlRead.pdf
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/chronicconditions.htm>
<http://www.secondscount.org/heart-condition-centers/info-detail?cid=df4c47c7-f2e0-40de-8593-124aa18c5431#.WivFtY1rzIU>

References

Starting school

PowerPoint - Julie Mclean
Children's Cardiac Centre
Clinical Consultant Nurse

Starting a Conversation

School Children with Heart Disease

Jillian Roberts & Sheryl MacMath

Managing Chronic Health Conditions at School

Compiled by Elaine Newell, Diabetes Federation of Ireland