

# Epilepsy

### Condition:

Children with epilepsy tend to have recurrent seizures, which can display high visibility symptoms such as convulsions and loss of consciousness, or may be much less noticeable. These seizures occur when excess electrical energy in an area of the brain causes a temporary disruption in its function. This disruption results in the brain's messages becoming halted or mixed up.

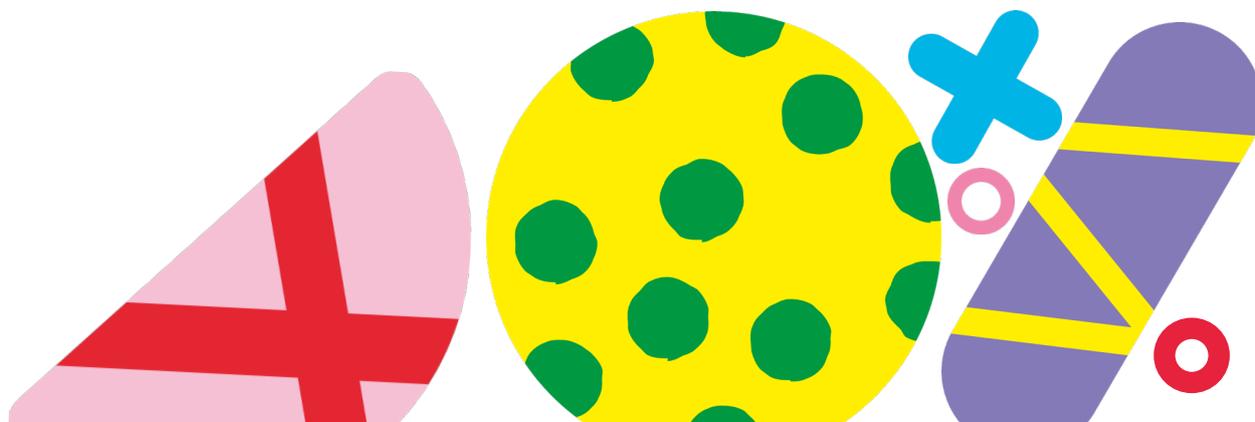
The brain is responsible for all of the functions of the body, so what is experienced during a seizure will depend on where in the brain the epileptic activity begins and how widely and rapidly it spreads. For this reason, there are many different types of seizure and each person will experience epilepsy in a way that is unique to them. There are over 450,000 people in the UK with epilepsy, many of them being children and young people.

### Problem Areas:

- There are many different kinds of seizure and it is often difficult for children with epilepsy to articulate what is happening to them.
- There are some common 'triggers' that can increase the likelihood of a seizure, e.g. lack of sleep, missing medication, flashing or flickering (e.g. 'strobe') lighting, illness/high temperature.

### Support strategies for your Group:

- Talk to the child's parents/carers to get a better understanding of the specific form of epilepsy that the child has. This is information that can be vital in the event of a seizure.
- For older children/young people, talk with them about what their 'triggers' might be and how to recognise the signs of an impending seizure.
- Avoid situations where a child is told, publicly, that they are "not allowed" to take part in an activity "because of your epilepsy".
- Always ask the parents/carers (for younger children) or the child/young person (for older children) for permission before discussing their condition with others.





- Assuming you have sought permission first, make sure that your team know what to do to ensure the safety of a child in the event of them having a convulsive seizure:
  - Remove anything nearby which may cause injury and cushion their head.
  - Ensure an ambulance is called.
  - Time how long the seizure lasts.
  - Contact the child's parents/carers.
  - Once the seizure has stopped, put them in the recovery position.
  - Stay with the child to reassure them.
- If a child has had a convulsive seizure during your group activity, they are likely to feel embarrassed or feel that the other children will avoid them. Try to reassure them that they are still accepted in the group and encourage them to come back, but don't overly fuss over them next time they come (or this may add to their embarrassment).
- One type of epilepsy, photosensitive epilepsy, means that the child reacts to flashing or flickering light. Make sure all fluorescent lighting is working correctly and has effective diffusers. Also, try to avoid using flashing or flickering (e.g. 'strobe') lighting for visual effects. If this is not possible due to the requirements of a specific event, give clear warning well in advance.
- Some people have misused passages about healing in the Bible to suggest that people with epilepsy are demon-possessed. This is, of course, highly offensive and could be very distressing and frightening to children. As always, any teaching relating to disability using Bible references should be done very sensitively.

### **Further information:**

Epilepsy Action                      [www.epilepsy.org.uk](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk)

Thanks to Epilepsy Action for much of the material used in writing this article.

*'Invited to Belong' has been developed in partnership between Urban Saints and Youthscape.*



*Youthscape*

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