



Chronic  
Illness  
Alliance

# Invisible Illness

—an online resource about children and young people with chronic conditions for school communities



## *Student Health Support Plans: Strategies for Helping Students*

*Date this entry was last updated*

February 2010

**This resource was made possible by a grant from  
The Jack Brockhoff Foundation.**

**In preparing this resource on Student Health Support Plans,  
the Chronic Illness Alliance would like to thank and acknowledge  
the important contribution made by each of the following organisations:**

**The Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute;  
The Chronic Illness Peer Support program, Centre for Adolescent Health, RCH;  
the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development;  
the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria;  
and Independent Schools Victoria.**

**We are particularly grateful to Eliza, James, Jemma, Sarah, Tamara and Vassie  
for giving us the opportunity to learn from their many experiences at school.**

*Chronic Illness Alliance*  
[www.chronicillness.org.au](http://www.chronicillness.org.au)

# STUDENT HEALTH SUPPORT PLANS

## Strategies for Helping Students

### ***Don't be afraid to ask***

Don't be afraid to ask questions about what the student is physically capable of doing. Some students can participate in all activities, some need a slightly modified approach, and others are greatly limited in what they can do.

Most students are willing to talk about their needs and limitations. Communicating directly with the student and their family will help you to work out where they fit in the continuum, and help you to decide what you can reasonably expect of them.

James's story (see <http://www.chronicillness.org.au/invisible/healthplan3.htm>) tells how his school encouraged him to step outside his comfort zone, which led to great benefits for his social and physical well-being.

### ***Who should be told***

Students are often very self-conscious about having a health condition. Involve the student and family in any discussions about

- who is to be told about the student's illness
- what is to be told
- how they are to be told
- when they are to be told.

Tamara and Jemma (see <http://www.chronicillness.org.au/invisible/healthplan3.htm>) have quite different stories about how their schools told their fellow students and teachers.

### ***Student and family are experts***

The student and their family are usually the experts on managing the student's condition, and the amount and type of support likely to be needed - after all, they've often been living with the condition for some years. Discuss with them how the school could best accommodate the student's needs.

Listen to Jemma's, Sarah's and Tamara's stories to find out about the strategies that were adopted to allow them to manage their health condition at school and to take part in normal school life.

### ***Modifications can make a big difference***

Modifying the curriculum or adjusting a teaching style to accommodate a student with a learning difficulty can make a dramatic difference to their academic outcomes and self-esteem.

Vassie's story (see <http://www.chronicillness.org.au/invisible/healthplan3.htm>) tells how she exceeded initial academic expectations, and successfully progressed to university with the help of a teaching aide. Eliza's story tells how frequent illness-related absences warranted reductions to her workload and leniency at exam time.

Vassie's and Eliza's stories illustrate the benefits that can result when schools are flexible and responsive to individual needs. Not all students need such modifications, which is why flexibility is important.

### ***Symptoms vary***

The symptoms of an illness often vary from person to person. Also, the symptoms experienced by an individual may vary with different episodes of an illness. Stereotyping an illness and its symptoms can disadvantage the student. It is important to speak to the student and their family about the nature of their illness and how it affects them.

### ***Support is important***

Support is important in managing any serious health condition. Older students can often manage their own health care needs. However, all students need support from those around them. Understanding their condition, dealing with their individual needs, and giving them emotional and physical support are all vital in maintaining the student's health and well-being, and ensuring that they function at their best.