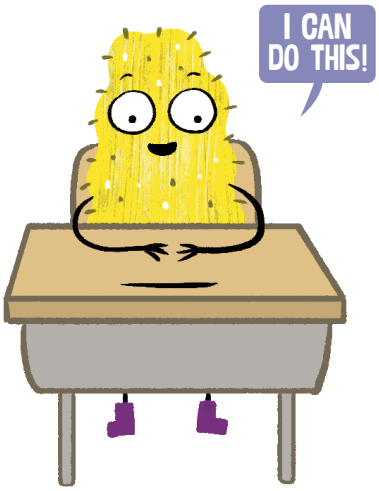
FAMILY EDUCATION SHEET:

School Guidelines for Kids & Teens with Chronic Pain



Is it normal to have problems at school because of pain?

Short answer: yep! More than half of children with chronic (ongoing) pain have some type of challenge with school. This can be anything from having a hard time showing up on time (or at all), difficulty keeping up with schoolwork, lower grades, and problems with friends.

You are definitely not alone.

Should I even be in school?

When you have something like the flu, it's a smart idea to miss school, stay home, and rest. What can be hard for many people to understand is that when it comes to chronic pain, **going to school is actually helpful.**

Even though you often don't feel great, regularly going to school is a very important part of your pain recovery plan. School creates structure, provides accountability and social support, builds physical and psychological endurance, provides a sense of accomplishment, and helps you feel reconnected to life. So, while you might feel like staying home, going to school will actually **HELP** the pain to get better.

Being asked to go to school doesn't mean anyone doubts your pain. It means that everyone knows **YOU** want to feel better and the research is clear this is an important part of that process. That said, it understandably can feel overwhelming to think about going to school and keeping up with the work when you are coping with pain.

What could help school to be easier for me?

The good news is that there is so much that can be done to make the whole experience easier to manage. Making changes to your **daily schedule**, getting extra academic support, and having a **team approach** that includes your doctors, parents, teachers, and school staff can help you to be successful and stay on track.

How do I create a plan to make things better?

Everything goes better when you know what to expect! It can really help to work with your school and medical team to create a plan that makes it clear what you need and how everyone can support you. Good advocacy is key. You, your parents, your medical team, and other trusted adults can all be involved in creating a plan that works for you. Keep in mind that plans often change over time. As you improve both physically and mentally at school, you'll likely need fewer and fewer supports.

What types of things should go into my plan?

Great question! Let's break it down:

Scheduled Breaks

If you are experiencing pain that is making it hard to sit through a class or stay in school for a full day, consider adding something like this to your plan:

- **Take a short break** (no more than 15-20 minutes) in a quiet space to practice pain management strategies. These could include self regulation skills like deep breathing, muscle relaxation, guided imagery, self hypnosis, and mindfulness.
  Even listening to music for a short break can be powerful.
- After this brief break, you should **return** to your scheduled activity/class.
- School staff should not need to call your parents during these breaks **unless** you have a new symptom (such as a fever).

HOW TO DO DEEP BREATHING:

- **BREATHE IN:** *5 counts*
- **HOLD:** *1 count*
- **BREATHE OUT:** *5 counts*
- **HOLD:** *1 count*
- **REPEAT**



Academic Supports



If you, like so many kids, have fallen behind with schoolwork because of your symptoms, making some of these temporary changes might help you to catch up:

- **Excused absences** for medical appointments and opportunities for make-up work without a penalty.
- **Extra time** for completion of tasks or assignments both in class and for homework.
- **Extra help at school or 1:1 tutoring**. Ask your school what they have available and look for community resources.
- **Access to notes** from the teacher or another student when you miss class.

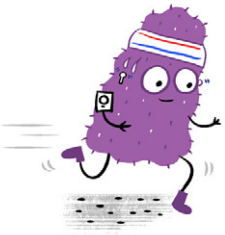
Physical / Environmental Supports



For many students, small changes in their school environment can have a big impact on their ability to make it through the day and feel more comfortable. These may include:

- **Extra time to change classrooms** (or leaving class early or late) so you can move at a slower pace, and avoid the hustle and jostling of a crowded hallway.
- **Access to snacks or water** in class or any time during the day.
- **A private bathroom** if needed.
- **Special seating** close to front of the classroom or door.
- **Access to an elevator** if needed

Physical Education (P.E.) Supports



Movement is an important part of pain treatment, but a traditional physical education class designed for the whole class can sometimes prove challenging. Simple changes agreed upon with a teacher can go a long way to make this a more manageable part of the day. Here are some things to consider:

- **P.E. participation may need to increase slowly over time**, as you get stronger and feel more capable. It may be helpful to get permission to determine your own pace and intensity instead of having to match the rest of class. This can allow you to fully participate when you are feeling better, but still allow you to pull back on days that your pain may be higher as you continue to get stronger and build more endurance.
- Some people with pain are working with a **physical therapist**. If you can't fully participate in PE, sometimes it's possible to use that time to do your **home exercise program**.



Access to Medication

If your doctor has prescribed medications, make a plan to be able to go to the **school office** for a dose as needed. You'll likely need a note from your doctor so everyone understands the instructions.

How do I get back to school after I've been gone so long?

If you've been out of school for several weeks or more, going back can feel like a huge challenge. A **gradual return** to school can help make it easier and raise the chances of success. Example? You might plan to return to school for half-days and work up toward a full school schedule.

Who can help me to get back on track at school?

This works best as a team effort. School staff, your parents, and trusted adults can work together to create a plan to slowly increase how much time you are at school. You should share any important information from your medical team so the school can understand what supports are most helpful for you. Remember that pain physicians and psychologists are often very helpful for specific recommendations as they've done this type of thing many times before!

For more in this series:

A collaboration between Meg Foundation and the Society of Pediatric Psychology Pain SIG

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