

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) School Fact Sheet

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) almost always affects the child's attendance in school. Some can attend school daily, some attend part-time, and others are bed-bound. A child appearing fine one day may wake up the next unable to go to school, sometimes for weeks or even months or years. There may be long periods during which the child is incapable of completing any schoolwork. Young, ME/CFS patients will most likely need personalized school schedules to accommodate their medical condition (i.e. homebound services; arriving to school late or leaving early; or only attending school for one or two periods of classes a week).

ME/CFS does not affect intellectual reasoning or language ability. Children should take classes that meet their intellectual needs and, if otherwise qualified, should be encouraged to take Gifted & Talented, Honors, and/or Advanced Placement classes.

Several neurological issues may impact the student's ability to learn. "Brain fog," a state of acute mental confusion or forgetfulness, is one symptom often seen in classrooms. Students also experience difficulty concentrating, have much shorter attention spans, and exhibit slower processing speed. Working memory may also be significantly compromised. Poor physical and cognitive stamina (that cannot be improved) limits the length of time students can spend on activities/tasks.

These issues may manifest in the classroom in several ways. Asked to complete a task and then interrupted, the student may not remember the instructions, or even being asked to do something. The child may take twice as long as healthy peers to answer a question or complete an assignment, and may temporarily lose the ability to retrieve information learned the day before. Increased distractibility from the illness often results in teachers perceiving the student as disinterested, immature, or inattentive. Classroom noises, or even the teacher's voice can be distracting.

These students are particularly at risk for Dyscalculia (inability to handle simple math calculations). They might correctly complete the steps to solve a complex equation, but consistently make simple mathematical mistakes. Dyscalculia should be considered when grading assignments, tests and projects of students with ME/CFS.

RESOURCES

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in Children and Adults U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/cfs/pediatric/index.html>)

Parent Information Center
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>

Massachusetts CFIDS/ME & FM Association
<https://www.masscfids.org/pediatric>

International Association for CFS/ME (<http://iacfsme.org/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx>)

Solve ME/CFS
<http://solvecfs.org/mecfs-resources/patient-resources/youth/>

Teach-ME: A sourcebook for Teachers of Young People with ME/CFS and Fibromyalgia
<http://mefmaction.com/images/stories/Support/TEACH-ME2edition.pdf>

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Diagnosis and Management in Young People: A Primer
<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fped.2017.00121/full>