2. Preparing for Inclusive Education

2.2 Knowing who to involve and how to involve them

Supported by

Introduction

When a person has a spinal cord injury, it affects the lives of all those around them. It also introduces them to new communities, in that they receive an inevitable flood of support from different professionals. For a school hoping to positively include a student with a spinal cord injury into their community, it will be important to know who has been involved in that child's care plan and what role they can play in the child's return to the school environment:

- when a child is in hospital
- statement of special educational needs
- knowing who to involve
- using circles of support
- using the common assessment framework and coordinated support plan

When a child or young person is in hospital

Schools should attempt to connect with the hospital soon after the child or young person arrives there. Early contact is important, as is setting a timeframe for their return. This early connection will also help make the transition out of the hospital and back to school an easier one.

Try to provide continuity for the child when they return to the same school. See ideas for providing this continuity and connection with school in section 2.3.

To maintain educational development, school staff and teachers can liaise with hospital teaching staff in order to help the child or young person stay up to date with the curriculum and aligned with what other children are doing. Involving parents in this communication as well has also been shown to be helpful for families and children.

If there are siblings in the same school system, schools should also be aware of the situation the brother and/or sister are going through. Some will be anxious about their sibling and will be undergoing significant disruption and adjustment in their family and social lives.

When a child or young person leaves hospital

Once a child or young person is discharged from hospital, it is likely most of their health needs will be dealt with by the community team. Some spinal cord injury centres continue to see children and young people once or twice a year for a multi-disciplinary review. Children and young people often also have occasional visits with health staff during summer holidays to continue development.

The psychology department at a spinal cord injury centre will also likely conduct routine reviews with a child or young person to gauge any new issues arising as they go through different developmental stages. This may involve issues like body image and relationships and sexuality when reaching adolescence, so it can be useful to engage these departments as required.

Statement of special educational needs

Many young people will return to school with a statement of special educational needs. The lead professional will then coordinate support across health, education and social services for that child and according to the statement.

The general process of applying for a statement requires an assessment at the local authority level, with the help and involvement of specialists such as educational psychologists. If it is decided to give the child a statement, the education provider completes a form that includes the following:

- what the child can and cannot do
- support they need in order to progress
- objectives (e.g. improve social skills)
- strategies the education provider is already using and anything additional that could be done (e.g. providing 1-1 support)
- any extra support the education provider may need

The process of applying for and receiving a statement can often take a long time but is often valuable because, as a legal document, it helps ensure the child will get the support they need. While most of the process is led by the school, parents can also request to start the statementing process or appeal if the statement is refused. People who can help in the process include the SEN officer at the local authority who gives advice to education providers or the Parent Partnership, which liaises with parents during the statement process. For more information on support for parents please see section 5.

Knowing who to involve

A child or young person with a spinal cord injury will suddenly be surrounded by a group of professionals who are now part of their lives. These professionals will come from different sectors (health, education, social care) and will likely share a similar goal of supporting the young person but will also have different priorities or ideas about how to achieve this. See the relationship map for information on key professionals that may support the child or young person.

This increased attention can be overwhelming and difficult to manage for the family and the child or young person. Schools can help coordinate the involvement of different professionals to make it more effective and easier for the child or young person.

> **Following our student’s trauma, she was surrounded by a lot of professionals involved in her rehabilitation and the process of integrating back into home and school life. The presence of so many people is to help but it can also be overwhelming. At school we were aware that this can all be ‘a bit much’. We felt it was important to encourage our student to make her own decisions and express her views but only when she specifically wished.**
>
> SENCO, Gloucestershire

> **One of the things that I’ve found that works particularly well is having a holistic approach at supporting disabled children in schools. It’s not just partnership of the parent and the school and the child. But it’s the partnership of the medical teams, social services, and educational people, etc. The successful examples of inclusive practice that are working for a young person are where you’ve got lots of agencies and individuals working together for the best interests of the young person.**
>
> Dr. Phil Vickerman, Professor of Inclusive Education and Learning, Liverpool John Moores University

> **Inclusion is the duty of the school’s leadership and it shouldn’t be a new educational initiative in any establishment. However, bringing all the services available together (even with the Common Assessment Framework) is not always easy, especially as time goes on. Even with ‘established protocols’ and schedules, it may still require one agent to bring all the relevant parties together and ensure that agreed actions happen.**
>
> SENCO, Gloucestershire

Voluntary agencies that specialise in work with people with spinal cord injuries, inclusion or working with disabled young people are good contacts for supporting the inclusion process. In particular, Back Up offers a mentoring scheme for young people with spinal cord injury that supports young people to meet and learn from others who have had similar experiences.

> **I had a mentor from Back Up. I found it easier to talk to someone who had some experience of a spinal injury, who was roughly the same level injury as me and the same age. She has been injured for four years more than me. She helped me with any questions I had, how things were going to work like driving, different transfers (like getting in and out of the car) and things like that. I talked to her for about a year. My mentor helped me realise that life doesn’t stop, that it keeps going and that I shouldn’t stop myself doing anything, as I can do anything I want to do, just adapted in different ways.**
>
> Danielle, 17

> **Most young people will have a ‘contact booklet’ of everyone who is involved, both in specialist centres and in the community. They are advised to have that and keep it up-to-date and usually the schools have that information as well [though it can be] variable across the country.**
>
> Angela Gall, Consultant, London Spinal Cord Injury Centre, Stanmore

Using Circles of Support

The Circles of Support model is an excellent tool to ensure continuous and integrated support for the child or young person and to know who is involved in the child’s life. This not only allows for more coherent and enriched support for the child or young person and their family, but it also reduces their burden or coordinating agencies themselves and resolving mixed messages.

For more information on using the Circles of Support model, see section 1.3.

Using the Common Assessment Framework / Coordinated Support Plan

The Common Assessment Framework (also known as a CAF) is a shared assessment tool used in Children's Services across England and Wales. It facilitates discussion between professionals from different sectors and organisations who are working with the same child or family so that they communicate and work together more effectively. Setting up a CAF for a child or young person with a spinal cord injury can be a good way to coordinate the work of the large number of professionals now working with that child or young person.

The CAF is set up with the consent of the family and child or young person, who are all active participants in the process. It supports partnership with families, involvement of the child or young person and a systematic, integrated way of services working together for the benefit of the child. One professional becomes the 'lead professional' and initiates meetings and communication for the group. A CAF can be set up a for a limited time and closed when it is seen to be no longer necessary and the child's needs have been sufficiently met.

To learn how to set up a CAF, contact your local council or Children's Services department.

Information and supporting tools on setting up and facilitating a CAF (from different local council web sites):

- City of London
- Doncaster Council

There is also a Common Assessment Framework for Adults in some regions of the country for young people who are over 18:

- Centre for Policy on Ageing
- Common Assessment Framework for Adults Learning NHS Network

Scotland and Northern Ireland use a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP) to outline the additional support children and young people should get from schools. A CSP acts much like a SEN statement as it is legally binding but it also serves the purpose of bringing together professionals from health, education and social care teams. For more information on the CSP process, see:

- Enquire: The Scottish Advice Service for Additional Support for Learning
- The National Autistic Society: Coordinated Support Plan Scotland
- Mencap: enabling children in Northern Ireland to 'reach their full potential'
- Department for Education Northern Ireland: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

In Wales, through the 'Families First' programme, all local authorities will be expected to develop and implement a 'team around the family model' and develop proposals to improve support for families with disabled children and young people.

Every local authority has developed a Families First Action Plan (2012-17).

To know more about Families First in your area please contact the Families First Co-ordinator at your local authority.

Resources

- Blueprint guide 'Going Back to School: Supporting Young People Returning to School with Spinal Cord Injury: A Guide for Schools'
- Knight, A, Petrie, P, Potts, P and Zuurmond, M. (2008) The school lives of children and young people with a spinal cord injury. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Report to the Back-Up Trust
- Parent Partnership: statutory services offering information advice and support to parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs
- Aspire: national charity working with people with spinal cord injuries
- Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE): organisation that supports schools and families work towards inclusive education

Common Assessment Framework:

- City of London
- Doncaster Council
- Centre for Policy on Ageing
- Common Assessment Framework for Adults Learning NHS Network

Coordinated Support Plan:

- Enquire: The Scottish Advice Service for Additional Support for Learning
- The National Autistic Society: Coordinated Support Plan Scotland
- Mencap: enabling children in Northern Ireland to 'reach their full potential'
- Department for Education Northern Ireland: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion
- Families First