

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT AFTER A HEALTH CRISIS

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KEY POINTS

- You should never be discriminated against for your health. This also means you should not be punished for absences related to serious health concerns.
- Schools, colleges, and universities have a legal responsibility to support students with additional health needs. Your school should have a clear policy for students with health problems.
- You can only get support and help for health concerns if you tell the school about them. You may need to provide doctor's notes and other documents.
- You can ask for help like: extra support in classes, the use of a computer or other technology, extra time in exams, or time off for medical appointments. Financial aid may also be available.

Different schools, colleges, and universities will have different policies. Speak to staff to see what they have in place.

Your rights as a disabled student

You cannot be discriminated against for your illness

It is illegal for anyone - teachers, administrators, or anyone else - to treat you worse because of your illness or a health crisis. This means that people working for the school, college, or university are not allowed to:

- Punish you for taking time off due to your health.
- Deny that you have an illness or that your condition is “real” when you have a doctor’s note.
- Stop you from taking part in activities which are safe for you.
- Treat you differently from other students (outside of necessary support for your health needs)
- Allow anyone to bully or harrass you about your health.

It also means that, when you apply for universities, they are not allowed to reject your application just because you are unwell.

Your school or university has to make reasonable adjustments to help support you and your health.

It is in the law that schools, colleges, and universities (as well as workplaces) must do what they can to make sure you can still access education.

What “reasonable” means can be different depending on the resources your school has. In general, it means that if you ask the school or university for support and they do not give it, they have to be able to justify why not.

“Reasonable adjustments” cover a lot of changes to how you learn. Later in the factsheet, we will discuss specific options which are often put in place to help with classroom learning, exams, homework, and university life. However, you do not have to choose from a list - if you can think of anything that might help you with managing your illness, you can speak to a teacher or staff member to see whether they can provide it.

Reasonable adjustments do **not** include: getting higher marks by default, being let off exams or coursework, or anything else that would give you an unfair advantage over non-disabled students.

Your school has to support your treatment

If you need to take regular medication throughout the day, your school or university should take steps to make sure this is possible, even if it means you may need to leave classes or go to the nurse’s office. You should **never** be prevented from getting your medicine.

This also applies if you need to leave school during the day to attend a regular appointment such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, or a check-up. While it is better if you can schedule these appointments outside of school hours, medical appointments should not be counted against you as absences, and you should not be punished or disciplined for taking time off.

Your information should be kept private

Although you have to share some personal information with your school for them to give you help and support, they should never pass this information on without your consent.

Teachers, lecturers, and other staff who know about your medical issues should **never** tell other students the details of your health without your permission. If they are asked to explain why you have reasonable adjustments, they should be vague. They may say that it is for health reasons, but not go into detail. You should always have the final say in who gets to know about your illness.

If a teacher or staff member asks you for private health information, you have the right to ask why they need to know, and you have the right not to tell them. Be aware, though, that this may mean they are not able to support you as fully.

Informed consent

Informed consent means that you have to understand and agree to changes that affect you. If you are under 18, your parent or guardian may be able to consent for you. For consent to count, the person consenting (you or your guardian) has to understand what they are agreeing to.

Even if you are under 18, you should be as involved as possible in decisions that affect you (such as adjustments that might be put in place), and you have the right to express if you are uncomfortable or unhappy with decisions made on your behalf.

The limits of your rights

Even if you have health issues or a disability, there are limits to what you can ask for. In general, you do not have the right to be treated better than people without health problems, and you do not have the right to adjustments that damage the education of people around you. Schools and universities also do not have to provide accommodations or adjustments which will cost them too much or which they feel are an unreasonable amount of work for staff.

Some key things to know about the boundaries of your rights:

- **Schools and universities will still require you to do the same amount of work, take the same exams, and cover the same curriculum as other students. Although you can have adjustments when taking exams, your work will be marked to the same standards as others.**
- **You can be prevented from taking classes or doing activities if the school believes that, even with reasonable adjustments, it would not be safe for you.**
- **Your medication may need to be kept in the nurse's office if the school believes that it is unsafe for you to carry it around.**
- **Universities cannot reject you based on your health, but they can reject you based on your grades, even if your health caused lower grades.**
- **Teachers and staff can only apply reasonable adjustments if they are told what is needed and why. This often needs a doctor's note. They cannot take your word for it.**

Getting the process started

1. Go to a doctor

If you have health concerns which are affecting your education, it is important to speak to a doctor (or sometimes nurse) about them. This is true even if you have already been to a doctor or to the hospital, but did not discuss how it affects your education.

Ask the doctor to explain to you (and your parent/guardian if needed):

- What your health problem is, or might be
- Whether you will need any more tests
- Whether you will need any treatment
- How long you can expect to be affected by your symptoms
- What changes other people with similar problems have found helpful at school

The doctor may not be able to answer all of these questions, but hopefully the discussion will give you some ideas of what to expect and how it might affect your education. It might also give you ideas for things that you and/or your school can do to help.

Make sure you ask the doctor to write a letter to your school or university, especially if they recommend that the school or university should make changes to help you. You (or your parents) should receive a copy of this letter, so you know what has been said and can refer back to it.

2. Find out who to speak to

There is usually someone with direct responsibility for you at a school or university, who will be able to manage your case. You may have to ask around to find out who this is. It might be:

- Your form tutor or head of year
- Your headteacher
- Your course co-ordinator
- Your university tutor
- A student welfare officer or SEN (Special Educational Needs) worker

Many universities also have dedicated disability or student welfare teams, who will usually be signposted on the website and in central offices. If you speak to them, they can either handle your case directly, or pass you on to someone who can.

3. Get organised

The discussion with the school or university will be easier if you are prepared in advance. Make sure that you arrange in advance when you will meet with the person responsible for your case, and that you know who will be there. Even at university, you are allowed to ask your mum or dad to come along!

Before the meeting, try to make sure that you have as much of the following as you can get in writing:

- A doctor's note, detailing what they think is wrong with you and any recommendations (they may send this to the school directly)
- Any notes you can make about your symptoms, when they have happened, and how they affect you.
- A list of any adjustments which you think might be helpful. It is often useful to discuss this with friends and family, and with teachers or lecturers if you are comfortable doing so, as well as looking through this factsheet to find common adjustments that might apply to you.
- A list of any treatments you are taking, and any appointments you have made or expect to make in the next few months. This does not have to include everything, but it can help to let the school know what to expect.

Remember that you can ask for support with the meeting itself, as well. If you need someone to help you communicate, or if you need the meeting to be in a place you can easily get to, or at a time that is best for you, you can always ask.

4. The meeting

Discussing your health with a teacher or administrator can be intimidating. Remember that you have the right to be treated with respect, and to choose what you share. It may help to print out this factsheet and bring it along, so you can remind everyone of your legal rights.

Make sure that you know what you want out of the meeting - adjustments, understanding, or just to touch base and make sure the school knows what's going on. It can be helpful to write this down ahead of time, so you can refer back to it.

These discussions can often take a long time, and may need to take place over several meetings. If you are looking for adjustments to be made, this will usually take a while, as the staff may need to have meetings among themselves and decide what they can do for you and how.

Before meeting with your school/university, ask yourself...

- Have I been to the doctor about my symptoms? Do I know what is causing them? (Having a diagnosis is not necessary but may help!)
- Have I asked my doctor to write a letter to my school or university explaining the issue?
- Have I collected any evidence from teachers or other adults in my life to back up what I am saying? (For example: absences, changes in your behaviour, or their concerns)
- Have I considered what I need the school/university to do to help me?
- Have I considered what I can do at school/university to help myself?
- Do I know who the best person to speak to is?
- Do I need someone to come with me? If so, have I talked to that person about all my symptoms and needs?
- Have I written down what my symptoms are and what I need from the meeting?
- Have I asked for a translator, support worker, or any other accommodations I might need to make myself understood in the meeting?

Before leaving the meeting, ask yourself...

- Did I cover everything on my list - symptoms, evidence, and any changes or help I think I might need?
- Do I understand everything that was said at the meeting? (If you brought someone else along, discuss the meeting with them to make sure you got the same things out of it)
- Do I need to do anything now? For example: contact my doctor, arrange another meeting, or provide more evidence?
- Do I know what the school/university is going to do to help me? If the school is taking further action, do I know when I will hear back?
- Do I know who I can go to if I have new problems, or if the changes that are made are not helpful?
- If I asked for an accommodation or support and they said no, did they explain why not?

If you feel you were not taken seriously or were mistreated during this meeting, speak to your headteacher or governors' board (at school), or your university's human resources or student support department. **Remember, you have a legal right under the Equality Act (2010) to access disability and health adjustments without discrimination!**

The next few pages will look at specific adjustments or changes you might want to ask for. You can ask for as many or as few adjustments as you feel you need.

Adjustments in the classroom

There are some day-to-day changes that your school or university might be able to make to help you learn. These might include:

- **Absences for appointments or other health reasons**

If you have a health condition that needs regular treatment, or have symptoms which may make it hard for you to attend class without risking your health, your school/university may be less strict about absences.

- **Providing a computer**

You may be given a computer or allowed to use your phone or computer as appropriate to help you keep up with the lesson.

- **Seating**

If you have visual or hearing issues that make it hard to follow the lesson from the back of the class, you can sit at the front. If you are in a wheelchair or have other mobility issues, or if you need to leave the classroom frequently, you might be seated nearer the door.

- **Remote learning**

If you are unable to attend school, you may be able to attend classes through video calls, get recordings of the class, or be given an amended version of the lesson to do at home.

- **Support workers**

If a trained support worker is available, you may be able to have them with you in the lesson. A support worker can help to interpret what the teacher is saying, write for you if you are unable, or provide extra help with the lesson.

- **A different classroom**

If you have mobility problems which make it hard to access your usual classroom, your school/university may be able to change the class to a more accessible room.

- **Longer deadlines**

If your health stops you from getting a piece of homework or coursework done on time, your teacher may be able to extend the deadline to allow you to get it finished.

Adjustments in exams

Exams can be more difficult when you are dealing with health problems. You can get some help to reduce the impact of your health on how well you manage your exams. These might include:

- **Rescheduling or delaying exams**

If your health is particularly bad during exams, or if you have a health crisis around exam time, you may be able to either take your exam on another day or wait until the resit period and take it then.

- **Providing a computer**

If your condition makes it difficult to write quickly, you can ask for a computer in order to type your answers instead. This computer may have additional software, such as text-to-speech, to help you understand the paper. It will not have access to the Internet.

- **Extra time**

If your health makes reading or writing difficult, you may be able to get extra time for your exam, so that you have the same chance as other students to read the paper and write your answers.

- **Rest breaks**

You may be able to get breaks during long exams. This is especially helpful if you have issues with fatigue/tiredness, if you have incontinence and have to go to the toilet more, or if you need to take frequent medication. Rest breaks might be timed separately from the exam, or they might be treated as extra time. You may have the exam paper taken away during your rest breaks so you cannot use the time to work on your answers.

- **Support workers**

If you already have a support worker in class, they may also be allowed to give you similar help in exams.

- **A different exam room**

If you have mobility problems which make it hard to access the room where your exam is held, your school/university may be able to either move the exam for everyone, or put you in a more accessible room

Many of these adjustments mean taking the exam separately to your peers.

Adjustments at university: Lectures

Most of the classroom adjustments can be applied to lectures and tutorials at university. However, because university lectures are usually more relaxed than school classes, there may be other support available, such as:

- **Recordings**

Your lecturer may be able to record their lectures in case you cannot attend. This might mean you get a copy of their slideshow and notes, or an audio recording of the lecture, or a video from the lecture theatre.

Many lecturers record their lectures anyway, as it can be helpful for revision. If you need a recording, just ask!

- **Providing a computer or voice recorder**

You may be able to get a computer for note-taking, or a voice recorder so that you can record the lecture or any comments on it, either through the university or through the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA).

- **Special seating**

Seating in lecture halls is usually not planned. However, if you find that you are unable to get the seat you need (e.g. wheelchair-accessible seating, seating near the front to help with seeing and hearing the lecture, or seating near the exit to allow for frequently needing to leave the hall), you can ask your lecturer to reserve a seat for you.

- **Attendance**

Some lecturers take attendance regularly. If you know your health will prevent you from attending all your lectures, let the lecturer know!

- **Lecture scheduling**

If you know before the start of term that there will be a particular time of day or day of the week when it will often be hard to attend lectures (e.g. because you have a regular medical appointment that day), you may be able to contact the administrative team **before the end of the previous term** and have your timetable arranged to try and avoid these times.

Adjustments at university: Living

Your university may also be able to offer help with non-academic parts of life, particularly where you live and how you get around campus. For example:

- **Accessible halls of residence**

If you live in university accommodation, you may be able to ask for preference when they are assigning rooms which are accessible to you - for example, rooms on the ground floor, rooms with an en-suite bathroom, or rooms close to the parts of campus you will be using most.

Some universities also allow students with disabilities or health problems to continue living in halls of residence for longer than usual.

- **A bus pass or parking permit**

If you need to travel around a large campus and you have mobility issues, you might be able to get a special bus pass or parking permit from your university to make this easier. (If you drive, you can also apply for a Blue Badge from the local council, which will allow you to park in disabled spaces on and off campus)

- **Counselling or other day-to-day health support**

Some universities have support on campus for students who are struggling with their mental or physical health. Ask the university's representatives whether there is any help available for students with health concerns.

There is also financial support available:

- **The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)**

This is support from the government to pay for any adaptations or extra equipment you need in order to study properly. This can range from computers, voice recorders, and assistive technology, to paying for a non-medical support worker like an interpreter or note-taker.

DSA may be paid directly to you, to the university, or paid in the form of equipment or discounts. You will probably be asked to attend a needs assessment to determine what DSA will pay for.

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