

Talking about absence seizures in children

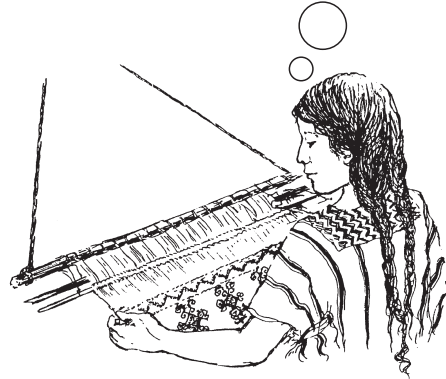
While absence seizures can happen at any age, they are most commonly recognized when children are between 6 and 8 years old. Children who have absence seizures may suddenly stop moving, stare blankly, or smack their lips. These episodes usually last only 3 to 15 seconds, but they may happen many times during a day—sometimes even hundreds of times!

If you are looking at a child having an absence seizure, you might mistakenly think the child is just not paying attention. You may need to see this blank staring a few times before you begin to recognize it could be a seizure.

As with other seizure types, be honest with the child about their absence seizures. Usually, they do not know they are happening.

To help a child with absence seizures, start by explaining that absence seizures, like other seizures, are a health condition. Then organize a safety net and support system by telling people close to the child—siblings, neighbors, the child's friends and their families, teachers—about absence seizures and what to do when one happens.

*Is Tariq daydreaming?
Why doesn't he listen
like the other kids?*

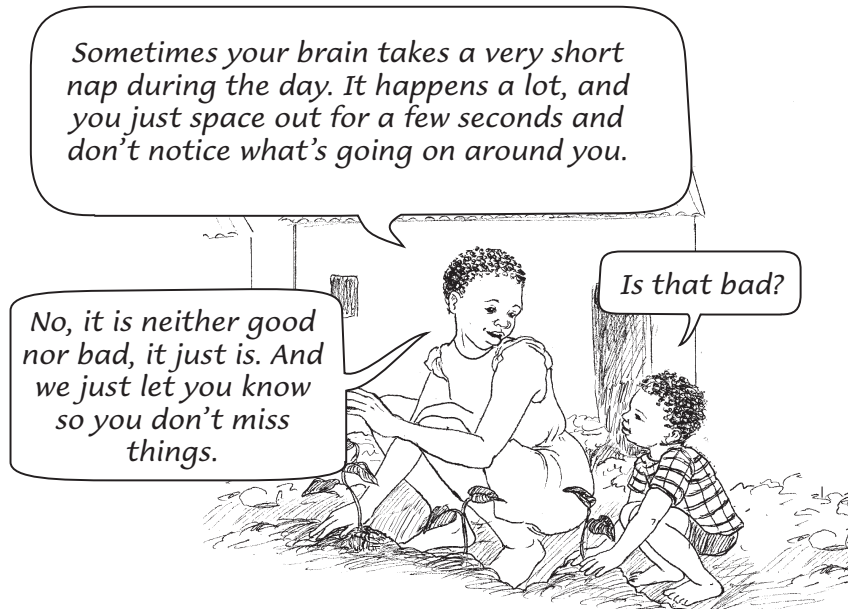


If you notice Gladys staring blankly or "zoning out" for a few seconds, don't be alarmed. Gladys gets absence seizures that make her lose focus and attention for a few seconds. When she becomes alert again, gently help her refocus on the task or conversation.



12 Talking with Children about Epilepsy and Seizures

Reassure the child that absence seizures are not their fault.



In absence seizures, a child typically does not experience an aura but just has a brief episode of “zoning out” and then a rapid recovery. This makes it all the more important for parents and teachers to talk to each other about what they are seeing. For more information about absence seizures, see Chapter 3, page TK.

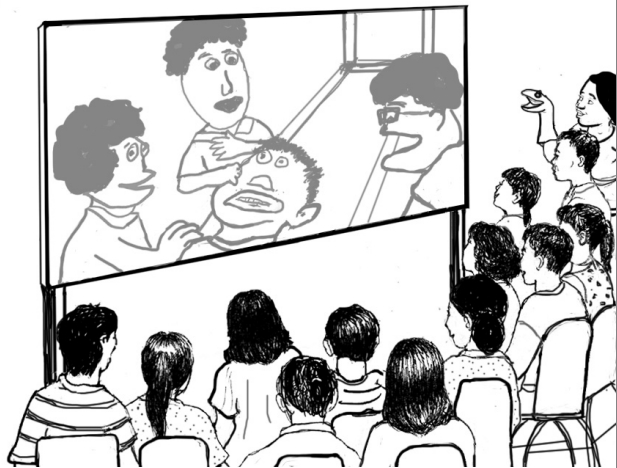


Promoting epilepsy awareness with puppets

Puppets are a great way to teach children about epilepsy. Children (and adults!) are attracted by the colors, entertainment, and performance of a puppet show. A good story and a few memorable characters make it much easier to communicate about and understand difficult or sensitive topics. Children with epilepsy and seizures who might not be able to talk about their feelings can learn from puppets that mirror their feelings, teaching them and others what it can feel like to have epilepsy.

Some community health promoters in Chile filmed a puppet show to raise awareness about epilepsy in elementary and middle schools.

The video features puppet Juanito who attends school with his friends and has a caring and supportive family. One day during recess, Juanito has a seizure on the school playground. His alarmed but quick-thinking classmates rush to tell their teacher that Juanito needs help. After making sure Juanito is safe, the teacher asks the students to describe what they saw. This not only helped the teacher understand the situation but also educated the children about seizure symptoms.



After Juanito recovers, the teacher speaks with him gently and calmly. She suspects Juanito may have epilepsy. This marks the beginning of Juanito's journey to understanding his condition.

We follow Juanito as he visits the doctor with his parents, spends time at home with his grandmother, and plays with friends at the community playground. In each setting, Juanito's experiences spark conversations about epilepsy, spreading awareness to different community members.

To see how well the video helped children learn, the health workers asked students a set of questions about epilepsy before showing it, and then asked the questions again after the children had watched it. Even the children who had never heard of epilepsy before were able to answer questions after watching the puppet video. And they knew what to do when asked, "What should you do if your friend has a seizure?"

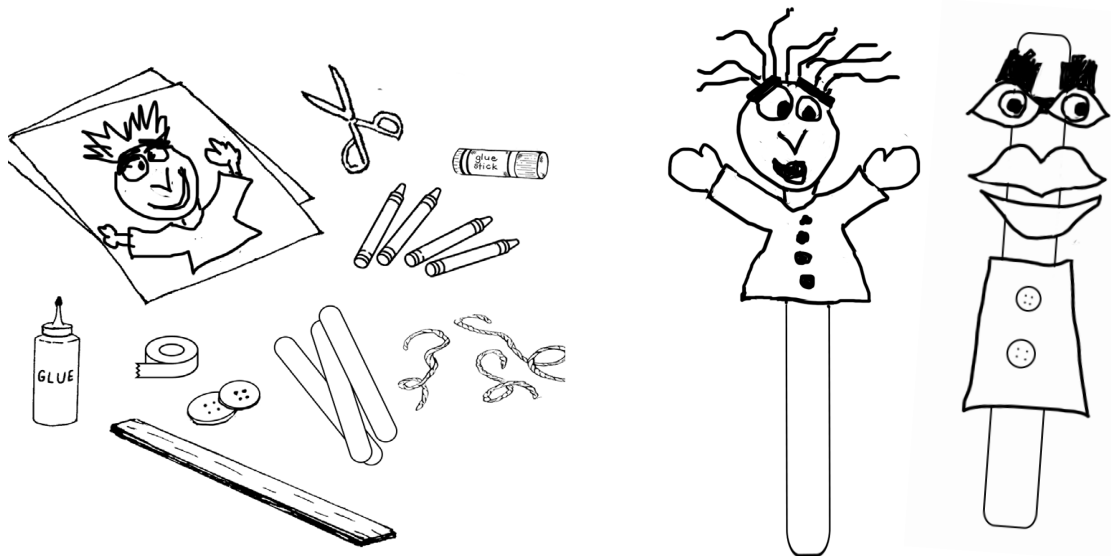
14 Talking with Children about Epilepsy and Seizures

HOW TO

Make puppets at home

Simple puppets to entertain and teach children about epilepsy can be made at home. The stories can describe experiences familiar to children like them, the adventures of epilepsy super-heroes, and everything in between.

Puppets can be made out of paper on sticks using something to draw with (markers, crayons, colored pencils), socks or paper (or cloth scraps), scissors, short sticks, and glue (or needle and thread). Or you can make sock puppets.



Together with your child, draw a few faces on paper or make them out of scraps of cloth. Glue or sew each face onto a stick or sock. Let the child name each puppet. Use them to tell stories about different topics, like what happens when a person has a seizure, or how to help when someone is having a seizure.

A puppet made from a sock looks alive.

1. Fit the sock over your hand.
2. Make the mouth by pushing in the cloth between your thumb and fingers.
3. Add eyes, nose and hair to the sock or to a box that fits over it.

