

## **Fact Sheet 8**

(For more detailed references refer to Fact Sheet 7)



# **Learning Issues**

Students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus are often sociable, talkative and personable. They show a tendency toward above average verbal skills and most fall within the 'normal' range of intelligence. However, many also show a tendency toward specific learning difficulties. The learning difficulties can be grouped under the following categories:

### **1. Attention**

Most students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus appear interested and motivated to learn, however they are easily distracted and find it difficult to sustain attention until the completion of the work.

*"Toby seems interested and starts tasks willingly, but rarely completes anything. His writing is awful".*

*"Peter works well when the teacher or aide sits beside him but he gets distracted and produces little if left to work on his own".*

### **2. Language & comprehension**

Students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus often have good vocabulary skills; however they may have difficulty monitoring what they say for logic, relevance or appropriateness. Many also have problems formulating language for written work and conversation and may have difficulty in connecting sentences.

*"Emma talks a lot but is often off the point. She does not listen effectively".*

### **3. Memory & learning**

Poor short term memory may be a problem; however it is more common to have difficulties in retrieving appropriate information from long term memory. Students can learn effectively, however it takes longer to learn and they may struggle with abstract concepts.

*"Melissa forgets due dates for work requirements".*

*"Jack does not remember today what he appeared to know last week".*

*"Ben can learn effectively but this often takes longer than his peers".*

### **4. Planning and organisational skills**

Organisational skills are often lacking and there are difficulties planning ahead and thinking flexibly.

### **5. Perception & motor ability**

Most students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus have difficulty accurately interpreting what they see in terms of shape, size, space and distance and then correctly matching their movements. They may also experience confusion differentiating between left and right and often have slow, untidy handwriting.

### **6. Problem solving & decision making**

The student with spina bifida and hydrocephalus may also have difficulty generating strategies for solving problems or in altering their approach if the first attempt is unsuccessful. There may also be difficulties transferring a problem solving experience from one situation to another.

### **7. Mathematics**

Since mathematics involves all of the fore mentioned abilities it is the most common difficulty for students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.

*"Sean finds it difficult to grasp fundamental mathematical and spatial concepts".*

### **Facts to remember**

- Learning is a varied experience for all
- Most students with spina bifida/hydrocephalus will exhibit similar learning difficulties however the range, and their severity in individuals will vary
- Although many of the difficulties discussed can affect any student at times, it must be realized that for students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus these problems are pathological in origin and need to be addressed accordingly.
- The level of educational achievement of students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus ranges from non-completion of secondary school to completion of university.

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