

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 speak to a support service, like occupational health, to provide documents to your school.
- 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 badly because of your illness or 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 diagnosed health condition.
- 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 harass you about your health.

It also means that, when you apply to universities, they are not allowed to reject your application just because you have additional health needs or a long term health condition.

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. If you can think of anything that might help you manage your illness better speak to a teacher or staff member to see if 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 count against you as absences. You should not be punished for taking time off due to illness.

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. However, be aware 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). 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. This often needs to come from a health care professional, like an Occupational Health professional.**

Getting the process started

1. 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

If you have health concerns which are affecting your education, it is important to speak to an occupational health service or student support service. You can be referred to these services by one of the above individuals.

If you have been referred to occupational health they may request further information about your illness from your GP. You will need to provide consent for them to access your records.

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.

2. 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. You are allowed to ask someone you trust to come with you.

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

- A note, detailing what is believed to be 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. If you are comfortable doing so, you can also discuss this with your teachers or lecturers. It might be useful to look 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. You might need someone to help you communicate. You might want the meeting somewhere accessible for you or at a specific time. You can always ask for adjustments.

3. 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. 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 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 school's headteacher or governors' board. If you are at university speak to the 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**

Your school/university may be less strict about absences related to your health condition. For example, if you need regular treatments or have symptoms which make it hard to attend class without risking your health.

- **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 classroom, 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 cannot attend school there may be alternatives. You might attend class through video calls. You might receive recordings of the class. Or you might 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**

Your teacher might extend your deadlines if your health has stopped you from doing your homework or coursework on time.

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**

Your health might impact your ability to take a specific exam or complete your exams. In this case you might be able to take your exam on another day or wait until the resit period.

- **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**

You may be able to get extra time for your exam if your health makes reading or writing difficult. So you will 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, your school/university may be able to change the exam room to better suit you. This might mean moving the exam for everyone or putting you into 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**

There are different assistive technologies you might be able to access through your university or the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA). For example, a computer for note-taking or a voice recorder for your lectures.

- **Special seating**

Seating in lecture halls is usually not planned. However, if you find that you are unable to get the seat you need you can ask your lecturer to reserve a seat for you. This might be because you need wheelchair-accessible seating, help with seeing and hearing the lecture, or to be closer to the exit.

- **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 your health condition will impact your upcoming timetable contact the administrative team **before the end of term**. They may be able to arrange changes to your timetable if they have enough warning. For example, if you will have a regular medical appointment on the same time or day as a future lecture.

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**

You may be able to request a specific university accommodation or bedroom according to your accessibility needs. For example, a room on the ground floor, an en-suite bathroom, or 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 have mobility issues and need to travel around a large campus, you might be able to get a special bus pass or parking permit 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.

Additional support you can access

If you are still at school

Please be aware that our Advice Line service can only provide support to people who are 18 years old or over. Below are some other organisations who are able to provide further support.

Long Covid Kids

Support for children living with Long Covid and their parents and/or caregivers.

www.longcovidkids.org

Childline

Offers a free counselling service for children and young people on a wide range of topics.

www.childline.org.uk

Phone: 0800 111

NHS24

Scotland's provider of digital health and care services.

www.nhs24.scot

Phone: 111

Children's Health Scotland

Provide health and wellbeing support Programmes directly to children and young people with health conditions and to their caregivers.

www.childrenshealthscotland.org

Phone: 0131 553 6553

If you are at university

Universities often have groups and societies you can join that offer peer support and connection. For example, Disability Networks for students and staff.

Being part of a Union can also support you and your rights. For example, the British Medical Association has a student membership which is free in the first year of medical school.

The Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line

Can offer personalised support and information:

0808 801 0899 or email advice@chss.org.uk

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland

Offers a range of booklets on lifestyle changes, symptoms and treatments.

Find these booklets online at: www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub

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You can also go to our website for information, advice and support: **www.chss.org.uk**

Find a range of easy-to-read booklets and factsheets at our resources hub:

www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub



Scan here to see all our resources!

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