Tips for teachers: managing children’s asthma

For parents, leaving their child at school for the first time is a big occasion – especially, when their child has asthma. Every child should be able to enjoy school and part of making this happen is to make sure that we all work together to keep children safe and well. Children’s asthma can have a significant impact on their ability to learn and thrive at school. It is important for teachers to understand the needs of these children, but also know which children in your class have been diagnosed, you can be better prepared for any issues that may arise.

It’s important not to single out those with asthma, but by knowing which children in your class have been diagnosed, you can be better prepared for any issues that may arise. Arrange a meeting with the parents to talk through their child’s asthma action plan – this is a written, bespoke asthma management program that references the triggers that make a child’s symptoms worse and explain clearly what to do if they experience those symptoms. Understood?

Communicate

Spend time getting to know your pupils, their families and their needs. Get to know what triggers their asthma; what does it look like? How do you support them; what do you need from us?

What happens if a child in your class suffers from an asthma attack – plan how you will act quickly and stay calm. Below are five tips to help you handle an attack in the classroom:

1. Encourage pupils to keep taking their medicine, even when they feel better. The medicine might help prevent future asthma attacks.
2. Keep an inhaler handy for quick relief when symptoms arise.
3. Have a plan in place for how to handle an emergency, including who to contact and what to do.
4. When a child with asthma is feeling unwell, make sure they stay in a calm and quiet environment.
5. Encourage parents to communicate with you about their child’s asthma, including details about the child’s health care plan and medication.

Prevention

When planning outdoor activities, check pollen count or air quality alerts that may affect children with asthma. There are simple free apps that can be downloaded on your phone to check this, such as the Air Matters app. Try to plan alternative activities to alleviate symptoms for sufferers, whilst ensuring they are not alienated from classmates.

Keep allergens at bay. Chalk from blackboards, dust mites, pet-hair and odours from pens and paints can all trigger asthma. Keep classrooms well ventilated so fresh air can circulate the space. An air purifier is also an effective way of improving air quality indoors, as it reduces irritants and allergens that can trigger health problems.

For air conditioned or heated rooms, it’s important to frequently check the maintenance of the system in place. Proper air flow, filtration and control of humidity will help to ensure there won’t be an indoor air problem.

If a child in your class suffers from an asthma attack, it’s important to act quickly and stay calm. Below are five tips to help you handle an attack in the classroom:

1. Help pupils to take their asthma reliever inhaler as soon as possible.
2. Help pupils to take their asthma preventer inhaler, if needed.
4. Keep pupils hydrated.
5. Keep pupils warm and comfortable.

For further information on asthma, head to Asthma.org.uk or contact your local doctor for advice.

What is asthma?

Asthma is a potentially serious chronic disease that causes the narrowing and inflammation of the airways, making it hard for sufferers to breathe. Some 334 million people around the world suffer from asthma, with the most common disease in children. Although there is currently no cure, proper use of the effective medicines on offer can relieve symptoms and cut the risk of asthma attacks.

It’s important not to single out those with asthma, but by knowing which children in your class have been diagnosed, you can be better prepared for any issues that may arise. Arrange a meeting with the parents to talk through their child’s asthma action plan – this is a written, bespoke asthma management program that references the triggers that make a child’s symptoms worse and explain clearly what to do if they experience those symptoms.

Symptoms may differ from child to child, but there are a handful of common indicators that a child may be suffering from an asthma episode. These include:

- Difficulty breathing, especially when they are exercising or running.
- Difficulty controlling physical activity.
- A tight chest, anxiety or soreness.
- Continuous high resistance or coughing.
- Persistent runny nose or nosebleeds.
- Difficulty completing physical activity.
- Drowsiness or tiredness.
- A tight chest, anxiety or soreness.
- Continuous high resistance or coughing.
- Difficulty breathing; wheezing and coughing.
- Difficulty completing physical activity.

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Symptoms may also affect a child’s ability to pay attention and, when serious, restrict their attendance of school. Because of this, it’s important to communicate with parents to ensure children don’t miss out on key stages of learning.

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