

Building on

SEIZURES  
& YOU

# TAKE CHARGE

of the **FACTS**

## A Guide for Extending Learning and Deepening Awareness about Epilepsy

**Includes:**

- **Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge DVD**
- **Three Interdisciplinary Lesson Plans**
- **Frequently Asked Questions about Epilepsy**



**EPILEPSY  
FOUNDATION®**

*Not another moment lost to seizures™*

EFA332

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[www.TakeChargeTeens.com](http://www.TakeChargeTeens.com)

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# Table of Contents

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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction . . . . .</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>About the Out of the Shadows: Teens with<br/>    Epilepsy Take Charge DVD . . . . .</b> | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Lesson Plan I: Epilepsy, Stigma and Teens . . . . .</b>                                 | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Lesson Plan II: Epilepsy and Discrimination. . . . .</b>                                | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Lesson Plan III: Research Related to Epilepsy . . . . .</b>                             | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Frequently Asked Questions . . . . .</b>  | <b>10</b> |



# Introduction

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In 2004, the Epilepsy Foundation and its affiliates began implementing an epilepsy awareness program for teens called *Seizures and You: Take Charge of the Facts*. At the core of this program is a lesson plan designed to be implemented in one 45-minute class period in middle or high school. This lesson is usually taught in health education classes, but may also be taught in science, English or social studies classes.

*Building on Take Charge of the Facts: A Guide for Extending Learning and Deepening Awareness about Epilepsy* provides three additional lesson plans that educators may choose to implement. Each of these lessons builds on the learning gained from the initial epilepsy awareness lesson. Additional supporting resources provided in the guide include a DVD titled, *Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge* and a Frequently Asked Questions section with clear answers to epilepsy-related questions teachers and trainers may get from students.

## About the Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge DVD

The *Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge* DVD is a fast-paced, documentary-style program that shares the stories of four teens living with epilepsy—Katie, Sterlynn, Bayron and Sara. It begins by reinforcing accurate information about epilepsy and reviewing the most common epilepsy myths. Throughout the program, each teen shares his or her passions, frustrations, hopes and dreams. In the end, the teens in the DVD offer clear and straightforward messages for other teens. A few of those messages are provided below:

***“Just because you have epilepsy doesn’t mean you can’t follow your dreams or do what you want to do.”***

***Sara, Age 18***

***“We laugh. We feel pain. We fall in love. We get heartbroken. We joke around. We hang out with friends. We do everything that the people without epilepsy do.”***

***Katie, Age 16***

***“I feel that I can pretty much do anything, as long as I am willing to put in the time and effort.”***

***Sterlynn, Age 19***

# Lesson Plan I: Epilepsy, Stigma and Teens

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The lesson plan provided below is designed to extend the learning gained from the basic epilepsy awareness program. It is recommended that this lesson plan be used within one week of presenting the *Seizures and You: Take Charge of the Facts* program.

**Relationship to National Education Standards:** This lesson plan addresses the National Education Standards for Health Education (health advocacy): Students will be better able to utilize strategies to overcome barriers when communicating information, ideas, feelings and opinions about health issues.

**Lesson Objective:** Students will identify and discuss common issues/concerns facing teens with epilepsy.

**Materials of Instruction:** *Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge* DVD

**Motivation/Warm-up:** “Write down 2 facts about epilepsy that you learned from the previous lesson and 1–2 questions about epilepsy that you have that have not yet been answered.”

## Procedure:

1. Go over the warm-up activity to review material covered in the core lesson and to generate a list of student questions. Jot the questions on the board for later reference.
2. Transition to today’s lesson by saying, “We learned a lot of factual information about epilepsy yesterday. In today’s lesson, we are going to learn more about epilepsy so that we can answer some of the questions you have raised.” Show objective for lesson and have a student read it aloud: Students will identify and discuss common issues/concerns facing teens with epilepsy.
3. Have students engage in a think-pair-share activity. “Let’s pretend for a few minutes that you and your family have just been told by your doctor that you have epilepsy. Think about how you would be feeling and what thoughts and questions you might have. (Give students 30–45 seconds of quiet reflection). Now think about this question: Would you tell your friends that you have epilepsy? (Give another 30 seconds to quietly think.) Now turn to the person sitting next to you and share your thoughts with each other.”
4. After students have had a minute or two to talk, ask for 2–3 volunteers to share their ideas. Try to get some variety of response by saying, “Did anyone feel differently than the thoughts that have been shared?” Ask, “Why did many of you feel that you would not or could not tell your friends that you had epilepsy?” Summarize the main points shared.
5. Use this discussion to introduce the DVD. “Many of the ideas you have shared are typical of the way people feel. We are going to watch a short DVD that shows how some teens with epilepsy feel and how they are dealing with some of the issues you have raised. All of the teens on this DVD are real people—not actors.”
6. After watching the DVD, conduct an open discussion about how the DVD may have changed some of their perceptions, beliefs, etc., about people who have epilepsy. Begin by asking the question, “Why do you think this program is entitled *Out of the Shadows* and what does that suggest about the way teens with epilepsy may be feeling?” Go back to the questions generated at the beginning of the period to see if any of those questions have been answered by watching the DVD.

**Summary/Assessment:** Give each student a 3x5 note card. Project the following on the overhead or write on the chalkboard: *The biggest challenge facing a teen with epilepsy is* \_\_\_\_\_.

Have students complete the statement and *give a reason for their answer*. If time permits, share some of the answers. Collect the note cards as an “exit ticket” when the students are leaving. The teacher should review the note cards to be sure the students have accomplished the objective of identifying issues facing teens with epilepsy and that negative stereotypes and misinformation have been eliminated.

**Homework:** Have students write a journal entry on the following topic:

Imagine that in the cafeteria today, a student with epilepsy had a seizure. Describe how you would react/respond to that student the next time you saw him (or her) and explain if your response would be any different as a result of what you have learned today about epilepsy. When the homework is collected the following day, use this opportunity to review or present seizure first-aid procedures (if not done during the initial “Take Charge” lesson).

# Lesson Plan II: Epilepsy and Discrimination

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The lesson plan provided below is designed to extend the learning gained from the basic epilepsy awareness lesson provided in the *Seizures and You: Take Charge of the Facts* program. It is recommended that this lesson plan be used within one week of completing the basic lesson plan.

**Relationship to National Education Standards:** This lesson plan addresses the National Education Standards in the following categories:

- **English Language Arts:** Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- **Social Studies:** Students demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.

**Lesson Objective:** Students will identify the causes and effects of discrimination and offer suggestions for helping to eliminate it in the future.

**Materials of Instruction:** *Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge* DVD

**Motivation/Warm-up:** Give students a list of characters from literature with which they are familiar and have them identify what the characters have in common. This same activity could be done in a social studies class by giving students a list of individuals from history.

**Possible Examples from Literature:**

- Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*: seen by others as “dumb” or intellectually limited
- Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*: experiences a mental breakdown
- Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*: very shy, walks with a limp
- Huck Finn in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*: poor, uneducated, father is the town drunk
- Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: African-American in a white-dominated society
- Anne Frank in *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*: Jewish girl persecuted by the Nazis
- Kit in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*: from a foreign country with different styles and traditions
- Jerry in *The Chocolate War*: refuses to do what the school hierarchy and the bullying mob tell him to do

Lead students to identify that the characters are all isolated or seen as different from the rest of the culture or society. Have students identify what it is about the character that sets them apart—see notes above.

**Possible Examples from History:**

- Copernicus—formulated a modern heliocentric theory of the solar system
- Galileo—defended heliocentric theory against the church
- Rosa Parks—refused to sit in the back of the bus and accept the Jim Crow system
- Susan B. Anthony—fought for women’s suffrage
- Helen Keller—multiple disabilities
- Monet—founded French Impressionism and went against the prevailing view of art

### Procedure:

1. Transition to the lesson by saying that although these are fictional characters, discrimination exists in the real world and affects real people—even today. Share the objective and have a student read it aloud. In social studies say, “Although these are people from the past, discrimination continues.”
2. Ask, “What are some of the reasons throughout history and today for which people have been discriminated against?” Have students work in pairs to generate lists. Their lists should include race, gender, religion, age, socioeconomic status, education, etc. If students do not come up with medical reasons, disabilities or handicapping conditions, give an example to help them add to their lists.
3. Ask, “Why do you think people discriminate against other people or groups of people?” (Because of ignorance, fear, a need to feel superior or important, to exercise control, or because that is the way they are taught by their parents or the culture they live in.)
4. Ask, “What are the effects of discrimination on the person or group being discriminated against? How does discrimination make a person feel? How might discrimination make a person act?” (A person could withdraw, be afraid, become angry, or even seek revenge.)
5. Ask, “What are some actions that a person could take to help eliminate discrimination?”
6. Say, “Today we are going to watch a DVD that features some young people who have experienced discrimination because they have the medical condition epilepsy. **As you watch, listen for how these young people feel and how they have chosen to respond to the discrimination they have experienced.**”
7. Show the DVD *Out of the Shadows: Teens with Epilepsy Take Charge* and discuss the two questions assigned for viewing. If possible, answer any questions that students may raise about epilepsy or refer them to the Take Charge Program Web site [www.TakeChargeTeens.com](http://www.TakeChargeTeens.com) or the Epilepsy Foundation’s Web site [www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org).

**Homework:** Have students write a journal entry about a time they experienced or witnessed discrimination. Have them explain how it made them feel and what actions, if any, they took at the time and if they would respond differently after today’s lesson.

# Lesson Plan III: Research Related to Epilepsy

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Unlike the other lessons, this lesson may be implemented without completing the basic epilepsy awareness lesson provided with the *Seizures and You: Take Charge of the Facts* program. Prior to implementing this lesson have students complete a short research activity about epilepsy for homework. This should include having students answer the following questions:

- What is epilepsy?
- What is a seizure?
- Who can be diagnosed with epilepsy?
- Can epilepsy be cured?
- How is epilepsy treated?

**Relationship to National Education Standards:** This lesson is not tied to a particular standard because research skills are taught in a variety of subjects. The research could be conducted as a home assignment or in the computer lab under teacher direction. It could also be a shared assignment between two or more departments such as health education and science.

**Lesson Objective:** Students will identify and use resources to develop a 1–3 page research paper.

**Motivation/Warm-up:** “Last night you were given questions to answer about a topic basically unfamiliar to you—epilepsy. Let’s see what information you were able to find.”

## Procedure:

1. Go over warm-up activity and have students answer the five questions by sharing the information they found about epilepsy.
2. Ask, “What resources did you use to find information about this topic?” Have students generate a list of online and other resources—encyclopedias, magazines, books, etc., to develop a class list. Have students copy the list of resources into their notes.
3. Ask students to think about research assignments they have previously completed in school. Ask, “What is the first step in beginning a research project?” (Select a topic.) Next, have them work with a partner to develop a list of the steps in the research process. As a class, develop a working list of steps. (See example below.)
  - Step 1: Decide on a topic
  - Step 2: Develop a general understanding/background of the topic
  - Step 3: Locate more specific information and narrow/broaden the topic as needed
  - Step 4: Analyze and evaluate the information to determine if additional research is needed
  - Step 5: Organize the information in a logical way
  - Step 6: Synthesize the information
  - Step 7: Write the paper to meet requirements

4. Tell students they will be completing a research paper on the topics related to epilepsy. Present the assignment: Use a minimum of three print and/or online resources to develop a 1–3 page research paper on one of the following topics related to epilepsy:
  - Beliefs and myths about epilepsy throughout history
  - Recent medical advances in the treatment of epilepsy
  - A contemporary or historical person with epilepsy who achieved significant success in his/her field
  - Legal issues, such as driving legislation, Least Restrictive Environment in education, and discriminatory employment practices
  - Causes of epilepsy—genetic, disease, accident/trauma
  - Correlation between epilepsy and other conditions such as cerebral palsy or migraine headaches
5. Look at each topic and discuss the type of research they would be doing and how the paper would be organized. For example, the first topic would probably adopt a chronological approach while the second topic might be divided into categories such as surgery, drugs, diet, etc.
6. Have students generate key words for researching each topic. Help students move from the general to the specific in crafting their approach to the research.
7. Depending on the grade level, use this assignment to review or teach bibliographic format, note taking and citation requirements as appropriate.
8. After students have completed writing their research papers, have them prepare oral reports, either individually or in small groups, to present the information they have found about their chosen topic.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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One of the biggest challenges teens with epilepsy face is that other teens—including friends and classmates—may not know much about epilepsy. Seizures can look strange sometimes. That can be a problem, too.

The teens in your classes will probably have lots of questions about epilepsy. Therefore we have provided you with a fairly comprehensive FAQ section. Review these questions prior to teaching any of the lessons provided in this booklet so you are prepared when the questions come.

## **Q. What is epilepsy?**

A. Epilepsy is a disorder of the brain that sometimes makes people have seizures. The seizures can cause a temporary change in the electrical function of the brain, which can affect a person's awareness, movement or sensations.

## **Q. What is a seizure?**

A. Brain cells are constantly communicating with each other using tiny electrical signals. When there is a glitch in this electrical activity, it can cause a seizure. There are many different types of seizures. Some can make you fall and shake. Others make you stare into space, act confused, or have convulsions. Seizures can affect the entire brain or just a small part of it.

## **Q. What causes epilepsy?**

A. That's hard to say. In most cases (about 70 percent), doctors know why a person has epilepsy. However, there are many things that can lead to epilepsy, including problems in development before birth, severe infections that involve the brain, a severe head injury, poisoning, or certain genetic factors.

## **Q. Is epilepsy hereditary?**

A. The role of genes or heredity in epilepsy is quite small. If one parent has epilepsy that has no known cause, then the risk is about four percent that one of his or her children will have epilepsy. If both parents have epilepsy, that percentage goes up slightly.

## **Q. Will someone with epilepsy always have it?**

That depends. Some people's epilepsy goes into remission after a few years. Others will always have seizures unless they take medication to prevent them.

## **Q. Is there a cure for epilepsy?**

A. No, not yet. Medications don't cure epilepsy the way an antibiotic can cure an infection. Medications can get seizures under control, but they only work if taken regularly. But that doesn't mean that a person will have to take them for the rest of his or her life. If a person goes for a long time without a seizure, his or her doctor may experiment with slowly discontinuing medications to see if the seizures return. But that's something only a doctor can advise you about.

## **Q. How many people have epilepsy?**

A. About one teen in 100 has epilepsy. More than 3 million people in the United States have some form of epilepsy. Thirty percent of them are children under the age of 18. A large number of children and adults have undetected or untreated epilepsy.

### **Q. What are the medical treatments for epilepsy?**

People with epilepsy take daily medication to control their seizures. In addition, there are other treatments that can be used successfully with some people. These include the following:

- Brain stimulation via a large nerve in the neck called the vagus nerve. This procedure involves surgically implanting a small device in the person's upper left chest and attaching it to the vagus nerve. Regular electrical impulses are then sent to the brain.
- A diet called the ketogenic diet. This diet includes lots of fat and hardly any carbohydrates. This diet is mostly used with young children and is not a do-it-yourself diet. It is serious medicine, and you have to be really disciplined to make it work.
- Surgery to remove a small area of the brain may work for some people, but is always a treatment of last resort.

### **Q. Can a teen with epilepsy drive?**

A. That's the big question, and it's a big deal to most teens. The hard truth is if a teen is still having seizures, he or she can't drive a car. Each state has its own rules about how long a person with epilepsy must be seizure free before getting a driver's license. These laws require that a person be seizure free for between three months and one year. If a teen is taking medication and hasn't been having seizures, chances are he or she can get a driver's license.

### **Q. Can a teen with epilepsy go to college?**

A. Of course. They'll need good grades and good SAT or ACT scores just like everyone else, but there's no reason that epilepsy should be a barrier to college. In some cases, medication can affect how quickly a person with epilepsy can complete tests and other projects. Therefore, a student might need to work with the college administration to work out some type of accommodation, like taking a lighter credit load, or possibly having extra time to complete tests and homework assignments.

### **Q. Can people with epilepsy get a job?**

A. Yes. People with epilepsy are successful doctors, lawyers, actors, bankers and businessmen. Just like with everyone else, for someone with epilepsy entering the workforce, the key is to have a well-written resume that describes your marketable skills and details your work experience. Work experience can include part-time jobs, volunteer work or community service. Sometimes, a volunteer job can become a permanent one.

### **Q. Is it safe for a teen with epilepsy to play sports?**

A. Most teens with epilepsy can safely play a wide variety of sports. But their ability to participate depends somewhat on the specific sport, the type of seizures the teen has, and how often the seizures occur. Sports like track, basketball, tennis and field sports are generally not a problem. Swimming alone is not a good idea, at any time for anyone with a seizure disorder. Teens with epilepsy should always swim with someone who knows about their epilepsy and is a good enough swimmer to help if a seizure occurs. Wearing protective helmets is important for anyone who is cycling or playing football or baseball.

### **Q. Can flashing lights or video games cause seizures?**

A. Some people are photosensitive, which means they may have seizures if a light flashing at a certain rate shines in their eyes, or if they look at flashing images of light and dark. If you've had an EEG test, they probably did a photosensitivity test as well. If you didn't have a seizure, or there were no telltale signs on your EEG, then flashing lights or flashing video game images may not be a problem for you.

**Q. When I asked the doctor about the kind of epilepsy I had, she told me a lot of long words. How can I find out more about it?**

A. The Epilepsy Foundation's Web site, [www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org), has a lot of information about types of epilepsy and types of seizures. A section of the site, called "E2R" (Entitled to Respect), has additional information for teens. There's also a teen discussion group under the heading, "eCommunities," where you can interact with other teens. Some local Epilepsy Foundations have teen groups where you can get to know others who are living with seizures.

**Q. If a friend with epilepsy falls down and begins to shake during a seizure, how can I help?**

A. Here's what you should do:

- Stay calm ... don't freak out.
- Move things out of the way
- Put something soft under his or her head
- Loosen anything tight around his or her neck
- Turn him or her gently to one side
- Don't put anything in his or her mouth
- Don't try to hold him or her down

**Q. If a friend has a seizure that looks like blank staring, loss of awareness, blinking, chewing, or other movements, how can I help?**

A. Here's what you should do:

- Stay calm and be reassuring
- Guide him or her away from hazards like streets, stairs and furniture
- Don't grab or try to restrain the person
- Stay nearby until he or she is fully aware again

**Q. Should you call an ambulance when someone has a seizure?**

A. Most of the time you don't need to call an ambulance. But, you do need to call an ambulance in the following situations:

- If the person is injured
- If the seizure lasts longer than five minutes
- If another seizure begins soon after the first one stops
- If the person has diabetes or is pregnant
- If the person requests an ambulance
- **Remember ... a seizure almost always ends naturally by itself**

**Q. Can a person die from epilepsy?**

A. It is very rare for a person to die from having a seizure. Most seizures end naturally on their own after a few seconds or minutes. There is a greater risk of injury or death if the person has a seizure in water, near heights or while driving a car. Rarely, a person may fall in such a way that his or her breathing is blocked, or he or she may suffer a heart attack as a result of the stress of the seizure. In very rare cases, a person with epilepsy dies suddenly for no apparent reason. Most cases of death involving epilepsy happen as a result of a series of untreated nonstop seizures. People suffering repeated convulsive seizures over a short period of time should receive immediate medical care.





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