

1. Learning takes place in the classroom. You've got to be there!

ATTENDANCE. Often when a student has a health need that requires extra attention, he/she will miss class. This might be due to illness, clinic appointments, surgery, or downtime as a result of equipment failure or maintenance.

It is important to stress to doctors and to technical repair staff that some of these issues can be handled on non-school days or after-school. Students need to be aware of the school schedule, vacation days or early dismissal times, class tests, state-wide testing, competency exams, end-of-the-quarter tests, or mid-terms. Also, know when school sporting or social events are planned. Work around these events when scheduling appointments as much as possible. Absenteeism and tardiness at school will be greatly reduced. It is common sense, but sometimes we need a reminder that we *do* have control over our time and how we spend it.

DOCTOR APPOINTMENTS. Consider scheduling your doctor appointments for after-school hours. Have the "block-out dates" written down when you call for an appointment so that you can explain up-front the dates and times you need to avoid.

Many times the person who schedules appointments is used to being the one in control (it is easier and takes less time on the phone), so develop a rapport by saying what you need (a certain appointment time) and the reason why (you do not want to miss learning time.) There may need to be some flexibility, but if you make these "well check-up" visits in advance, it's easier for the clinic to accommodate your requests.

KEEP EVERYTHING WORKING! Try to do regular maintenance on wheelchairs, van ramps, batteries, and other medical devices to avoid missing school due to mechanical failures. Prevention works wonders to keep you from hassles and breakdowns.

PERSONAL NEEDS. Another issue that takes students away from the classroom is bathroom time, especially if the student needs assistance. Talk with your doctor about ways to help regulate bathroom times—to increase bladder control and implement a bowel management program at home, before or after school. Bathroom visits that are 10 minutes here and 20 minutes there add up at the end of the day. If you chart the time that is spent out of the classroom on non-learning activities, you may be amazed how many minutes are lost each day. Think about why personal needs might be time-consuming—socializing with aides or peers, physical effort, and support all take time. Learning to care for personal needs efficiently will be helpful later in the employment setting.

EATING ON THE RUN. In many school cafeterias, that's exactly what it might feel like. There are only so many minutes in a school schedule and getting to and from the cafeteria takes time. This takes away from a relaxing lunchtime and being with friends. Students deserve to be able to socialize with their peers without adult aides present.

Ask your doctor or a nutritionist about having a liquid "power drink" instead of the traditional lunch food. And of course, fruits and vegetables are a must! Trouble chewing? Try fruit smoothies or minced vegetables in soup via straw.