

UNDERSTANDING SCD IN THE CLASSROOM

FOSTERING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Possible risk for depression and/or anxiety

Many students with SCD cope fairly well with their illness. However, children with chronic illnesses, such as SCD, are more at risk for developing some social-emotional issues such as depression and/or anxiety.

Reasons might include:

- **Vulnerability to teasing or bullying.** Some students with SCD have a shorter stature, may experience jaundice (yellowing of the eyes) and may reach puberty at a later time than their peers. In addition, children with SCD may have bed-wetting issues. These physical differences, along with the fact that children with SCD sometimes are absent from school on a fairly frequent basis due to pain episodes and medical appointments, can make students with SCD feel alienated or be a vulnerable target for teasing or bullying.
- **Vulnerability to alienation.** Regardless of physical appearance, some students with SCD may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their illness, and may not be comfortable sharing their condition with others. Sometimes embarrassment or shame can lead to changes in behaviors. In addition, the fact that some students miss a significant amount of school sometimes prevents them from establishing strong connections with their peers.
- **Vulnerability to low self-esteem.** As previously noted, students with SCD may also have cognitive impairments that negatively affect academic functioning. They may also experience academic difficulties due to the loss of instructional time due to pain, medical appointments or treatment. These academic challenges may also negatively impact students' self-esteem and/or their motivation and concentration, as well as further alienate them from their peers.

How You Can Help

Take the following issues into consideration:

- 1. Normal treatment.** Treat the student with SCD as normally as possible.
- 2. Group or partner projects.** Foster group and partner projects to help student improve connections with others and build social skills.
- 3. Identification of strengths.** Help student to identify their strengths.
- 4. Support for self-esteem and competence.** Assign student special tasks to assist with building self-esteem and competence.
- 5. Support after extended absences.** After extended absences, welcome the student back. Talk to the student and family about what information, if any, they want shared with the class.
- 6. Social skills and peer interactions.** Refer to school guidance counselor (if available) if there are concerns regarding social skills or peer interactions.
- 7. Concerns about mood and behavior.** Communicate concerns regarding student's mood and behaviors to caregiver(s) as early as possible. Encourage caregiver(s) to seek treatment for their child. A child or adolescent psychologist or therapist can assist the student with learning effective coping skills to manage sadness and anxiety, teach pain management skills, and help the student learn appropriate ways to respond to their peers.