

students with functional neurological disorder

What is functional neurological disorder?

Functional neurological disorder is a condition when a person suddenly develops physical symptoms that have no medical explanation. These symptoms often appear after a stressful or traumatic event. Possible symptoms include:

- Inability to move an arm or leg
- Partial or complete loss of vision
- Changes in speech or inability to speak
- Hearing loss
- Frequent falls
- Difficulty swallowing
- Numbness
- Tremors

Treatment

Treatment for conversion disorder typically involves education, therapy, and physical rehabilitation. With treatment, most symptoms improve within about two weeks. While not life-threatening, symptoms can interfere with a student's daily activities and school performance.

How can functional neurological disorder affect a student at school?

Children with functional neurological disorder are encouraged to attend school unless they are hospitalized. Without treatment, students may struggle to keep up with daily routines. Children may struggle in the following areas:

- **Academic:** poor attendance, declining grades, difficulty focusing and paying attention
- **Social/Emotional:** social withdrawal, limited participation in class activities
- **Physical:** frequent visits to the school nurse

How can schools support students with functional neurological disorder?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Assign a **manageable workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Provide **printed copies of notes, highlighted materials, and recorded lessons**.
- Break **down tasks** or reading into **smaller sections** ("chunking").
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.
- Offer **preferential seating** to reduce distractions.
- Hold regular parent-teacher conferences to **monitor progress and adjust supports**.

Social and Emotional

- Provide **counseling or emotional support** as needed.
- Let the student choose a **trusted adult** when their therapist is unavailable.
- **Encourage participation** in extracurricular activities and school events.
- Support a **gradual return** to school if the student has been absent for an extended time.

Physical

- Offer **preferential seating** (e.g., near the door).
- Include in **daily school routines** with appropriate support.
- Adjust **physical activities** based on the student's needs and comfort level.

More Resources

- **American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry**
aacap.org
- **Anxiety & Depression Association of America**
adaa.org
- **National Institute of Mental Health**
nimh.nih.gov/
- **Nemours Kids Health**
kidshealth.org

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit childrens.com/school-services

