

School Talks Series – First Grade

Annie wants me to talk to you about why her right hand and arm doesn't work as well as her left one. Annie has what is called hemiplegia. Before she was born she had what is called a stroke and the part of her brain that makes her right arm, hand and leg work was hurt. It wasn't Annie's fault this happened, it wasn't anyone's fault, it just happened.

The brain is a funny thing. Some of you may think that all it does is think and help you learn new things. It does that, but it does lots of other things too. Like tell you when you are hungry, see, taste, hear, smell, talk, feel things, and move all of the parts of your body, along with lots of other things. Wiggle your fingers. Your brain is telling your fingers to move. That part of Annie's brain can't tell her right fingers to move, no matter how hard she tries.

Even though that part of Annie's brain was hurt, she can still think, learn, make choices, and have the same feelings as all of the rest of you. It just means that her right arm and leg are not as strong as her left arm and leg.

Because her right hand is weaker, she sometimes has trouble doing some things. Like cutting, writing, taking lids off markers, putting on her mittens, zipping her jacket and tying her shoes. One of the things that she tells me makes her really mad is that she can't climb to the top of the monkey bars and the rainbow and do all the tricks on the playground that the rest of you can do.

When Annie was born she couldn't move her right hand and arm by herself at all. She has worked very hard all of her life to learn to do the things that she can do now. She has had to teach her brain how to do all those things. She has two very special people, her therapists Peggy and Lisa, who she sees every week that have helped her learn how to use her hand and leg. Annie has learned to do things differently along the way and to use other parts of her body besides her hand to do things. Like, how she uses her mouth to hold a marker to get the lid off if it is on really tight. Or she holds things between her legs instead of with her hand.

One of the main reasons why Annie and I decided to talk with you today about all of this is that her doctor and therapist say that she needs to wear a different brace on her leg. She has told me that she is afraid that some of the kids will laugh at her because of it. Some of you have probably seen the little brace that she wears inside her shoe. Her new brace will look a lot like this one (show night stretching brace) without these two side straps. This new brace will help her foot move better and help keep her from falling and help her to run faster.

So, as Annie's mom, I wanted to let you know about all of this. Some of you have already asked me why Annie's hand doesn't work right. Maybe you could help us out if some other kids say something about Annie not using her hand or her new brace, you could tell them about her hemiplegia. I also want to ask you to help her if she asks for help. She doesn't ask for help unless she really can't do something by herself.

Experiential exercise:

Putting sock on fist dominant hand and cut out smiley faces and write their name on the back of the circle. Teacher will write down overheard comments and we will talk about how it might feel to have a hand that doesn't work right.

Page content written by Diane Kolpin.