

School Talks Series – Second Grade

I want to talk to you about why Annie's 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 a stroke and it hurt the part of her brain that makes her right arm, hand, and leg move. It wasn't Annie's fault this happened, it wasn't my fault, it wasn't anyone's fault, it just happened.

The brain is an amazing 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, help you 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 for me. Right now, your brain is telling your fingers to move. That part of Annie's brain can't tell her right fingers to wiggle, no matter how hard she tries.

Even though that part of Annie's brain was hurt, she can still think, learn, make choices, and she has 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.

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 in her life, Peggy and Lisa, her therapists, who she sees every week. They have helped her learn how to use her hand and leg. Because of her hard work, she can open and close her right hand and hold some things with it and use it a lot more than she ever has.

One of the things that we have to fight most with Annie's hemiplegia is that her muscles in her arm and hand get tight, which keeps her from using her hand as well as she can. When the big muscle in the back of her leg gets tight, it is hard for her to bring her toes up when she runs, so she falls a lot. This is why she wears the brace that she wears on her right foot, it helps keep her toes up so that she doesn't fall. She wears this stretching brace at night to keep that big muscle stretched out. She also sees special doctor called a physiatrist, Dr. Kzaicek, who gives her special shots, called Botulinum Toxin, in her arm, thumb and leg which help keep the muscles relaxed. Annie has had close to 40 of these shots in her life. Can you imagine getting a shot in your thumb?

Because her right hand is weaker, Annie sometimes has trouble doing some things. She uses other parts of her body besides her hand to do things. She uses her mouth a lot to hold things, like markers with tight lids on them. Cutting, writing, zipping her jacket and tying her shoes are some things that she has trouble with. She is working on figuring out how to zip her jacket and tie her shoes, but in the meantime, she needs some help with these. Think about it the next time you zip your jacket or tie your shoes. How would you do it mostly one-handed?

Sometimes, but not very often, Annie gets mad about her hand and arm not working right. One of the things that she tells me makes her feel mad is that she can't climb across the monkey bars and do all the tricks on the playground that the rest of you can do. She was just telling me this morning how it's hard to not be able to run really fast, because she can't catch other kids when you are playing tag.

So, as Annie's mom, I wanted to let you know about all of this and ask you to help us out. If some other kids say something about Annie not using her hand or her brace, maybe you could tell them about her hemiplegia. I also need 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, like tying her shoes or zipping her jacket.

Experiential exercise: Putting sock on fisted 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.