



Notes from our workshop exercise

Thank you for attending our recent workshop “Supporting Children with eczema at school”. During the workshop, we discuss a number of scenarios that may crop up for a child in a school/nursery environment. In case we didn’t have time get to them all or you just want to have them to refer to again, here are the transcripts of the recordings along with our suggestions for how you could help in each situation.

Scenario 1 – Starting school (Esme)

Esme’s challenge:

When I started school, my eczema got really bad. Stuff in the classroom made it worse and my clothes felt scratchy. I was itchy all the time and found it hard. I couldn’t sleep and felt tired. I didn’t like school.

Our suggestions for how you could help Esme:

- If a parent mentions potential triggers for their child’s eczema, try to work with them on ways to avoid these e.g. gloves, reminder to wash hands and apply cream if doing an activity that may irritate the skin
- Highlight the benefits of the parent helping their child be independent and able to apply their own creams. Suggest a phased approach (e.g parent talks through how to apply creams, next time puts cream in child’s hand to apply, then allows child to do it while monitoring)
- Reward charts can help encourage a child to apply creams (at home or in school)
- Make sure you remind the child to apply creams throughout the day, especially if you can see they are itchy. They may forget if playing or concentrating. You could have an alarm on your phone to act as a reminder.
- Sometimes a member of support staff or office staff is happy to help applying creams.
- If sleep is a big issue, see if a later start time can be allowed, sometimes children end up falling asleep very late and then need to be woken out of their deep sleep. They can take longer to prepare for the classroom both physically (creams) and mentally (if still tired/groggy)
- Some schools have a noticeboard that is used to highlight which children in the school have a medical condition that staff should be aware of. Sometimes, photos of the children can be displayed also and this can be a great way to share important information with the staff.
- If the parents let you know about planned absences due to appointments, agree to provide the work that is going to be missed

Esme's update:

I have a new teacher who has eczema too and knows what can make it worse. She reminds me to put on my creams and I can wear a comfy top. The headteacher says it's OK to come in late if I am up all night with my eczema. I like school a lot more now!

Scenario 2 – Teasing/comments (Ben)

Ben's challenge:

Some people say mean things about my skin. They call me nasty names and sometimes laugh at me. I know they don't want to hold my hand because they think they can catch eczema.

Our suggestions for how you could help Ben:

- If a parent mentions any issues of comments/bullying, then listen carefully and take action. Your school will have its own policy for how to handle instances of bullying. In some cases tackling it with the whole class is appropriate but sometimes, it needs to be addressed with the smaller group of children who are involved and a senior member of staff may need to be involved.
- Children can be mean sometimes. It is important to understand what is driving this behaviour. If this is driven by fear of an unknown condition, then you can offer some education about eczema. If it's due to a lack of compassion or empathy towards other people, then you can provide group tasks talking about feelings, the importance of being kind and how we can support our class friends. The ideal way to do this is through our workshop. Sometimes bullying can be driven by problems in the bully's life, so it is worth understanding their situation and problems
- Young children with eczema may not have related much with people outside of their families and friends. They may not understand how other people might respond to their symptoms. You can discuss this with them on their own and agree with them how they might communicate about their eczema that will reassure others e.g It's only eczema, you can't catch it.
- Our wellbeing resources are a great tool to help a child to be prepared for unhelpful comments/questions. They can have a simple response ready to use so they are not caught off guard. These resources can be used at home or at school.
- If you notice a child becoming more withdrawn and/or excluded, then check in with the child and/or parents to see if there is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Ben's update:

Eczema Outreach Support did a workshop for my class. At first, I was scared it might make things worse. But everyone thought it was fun and liked the moisture meters. They don't say mean things anymore and most people don't mind holding my hand now because they know they can't catch it.

Scenario 3 – Where and when to put creams on (Maisie)

Maisie's challenge

I have my cream in school and I know putting it on helps. But usually I have to do it in the toilet and I don't like that. It's annoying when I need to do my cream because I miss out on things I like.

Our suggestions for how you could help Maisie:

- Emollients are a really important part of any child's treatment plan for eczema. If applying these in school becomes a source of stress, this is really unhelpful for the child. Having the creams easily accessible in either the classroom or the office is important. This makes them less likely to be forgotten or deliberately put off by the child.
- If a child isn't provided with a hygienic, private space to apply his/her creams, this might deter them from applying them at school which could cause their eczema to worsen.
- Agree with the family when would be a good time for creams to be applied through the school day. A routine is good but if a teacher sees a child starting to scratch, it is worth prompting them to apply their creams.
- Know how many times is optimal and how long it should take to do so. Work out a plan that would make it easy to achieve this goal e.g. if cream needs to be applied many times a day then the location of the cream needs to be closer and more accessible to prevent wasted time.
- Sweat can be a trigger so after PE or a hot playtime, it can be beneficial to apply cream. For PE, it's a good idea to allow a child with eczema to finish a little earlier than the rest of the class to go and apply their creams.
- If a child misses out on some work when they are away to apply their creams, help them get back up to speed so they aren't impacted
- Allow a buddy to join the child when they are putting their creams
- Doing it just before/after break can be a good time

Maisie's update:

My parents spoke to the head teacher to see if there was somewhere else I could put my cream on. I have a room I can use now, which is much better than the toilet! Since I get itchy when I'm hot, the teacher lets me finish PE early so I have time to put on my creams.

Scenario 4 – Residential (Luke)

Luke's challenge:

I have my first school residential in a few months, and I'm really worried about it. What if I can't sleep because I'm itchy and then I'm too tired to join in?

Our suggestions for how you could help Luke:

- Meet with the parent and child in advance and again closer to the time
- Discuss what the potential triggers might be e.g. bedding, certain activities, specialist clothing, pollen, dust

- Discuss solutions for any triggers: bring own bedding/pillows, lots of changes of clothes so can change after any activities where clothes get damp, will probably need more regular applications of creams
- Be aware as a teacher what treatments are required and what support Luke will need with these e.g. emollient, steroid, antihistamines
- Know which ones can be made accessible to the child and which ones need to be kept by a member of staff
- Make sure a private room is available for application of creams.
- Make sure suncream is provided that is previously tried and tested
- Are there any extra items worth bringing to help e.g. gel pack, eczema garments to wear under the clothing provided, own bedding, extra clothes
- Use our wellbeing resources to help if worried in the run up to the residential
- Be a point of contact for the child while away and make sure they know they can come to you (if for some reason you aren't going, assign someone else who is made aware of the issues discussed)
- We know that some parents have been kept updated during a residential by a member of staff and they found this hugely reassuring.

Luke's update:

I had a great time! We had a meeting with the teacher which helped me feel better.

I was allowed to take my own sheets and duvet cover and lots of spare clothes. I had somewhere to go to put my creams on and I knew I could go to my teacher if my skin was sore. I loved all the activities, My teacher said I didn't have to do the ones in the water because that made my eczema worse. But I used lots of extra cream and I didn't miss any.