

# Supporting the mental health of students with childhood-onset heart disease (CoHD)



## Understanding CoHD

CoHD refers to a range of congenital or acquired heart conditions diagnosed in children. These conditions are present from birth or develop during childhood and can have a significant impact on a child's physical and emotional development. Students with CoHD can face unique challenges that extend beyond the physical symptoms of their condition. The need for frequent medical care, the potential for physical limitations, and the emotional stress of managing a chronic condition can all affect a student's mental health and academic performance. Understanding these challenges is essential for providing effective support and ensuring that these students can thrive both academically and personally.



## Potential mental health challenges for students with CoHD

**Feeling different:** Physical differences like scars, being breathless, having to take medications daily frequent medical appointments, and hospitalisations can make students feel out of place among peers.

**Adjustment requirements:** special accommodations for activities and learning can further highlight difference and feelings of isolation.

**Time away from school due to appointments and procedures:** can disrupt a student's academic progress and social connections, leading to anxiety about falling behind, and increased stress.

**Fatigue:** Experiencing significant fatigue is common, affecting concentration and capacity to achieve their academic goals.

**Developmental delays:** Children with CoHD, especially complex cases, may be at an increased risk for neurodevelopmental challenges. Not all children with CoHD have these difficulties, but it's important to be aware of the potential of this in students and to communicate with parents and caregivers if you notice any potential developmental concerns.

## Support for students with CoHD



### Checking in

Check in with your student to see how they are going and how they are managing their workload, and if any adjustments are needed or if wellbeing support would be helpful. Communicate with parents if any changes or concerns are noticed to ensure a coordinated approach to the student's mental health and academic needs.



### Inclusive education

For students who may need extra support to reach their academic goals, develop individualised education plans (IEPs) that factor mental health alongside academic and physical accommodations. Additionally, consider specialised plans for students coming back from medical absences to help to ease the anxiety of falling behind their peers.



### Teacher training

Educate teachers about CoHD and its impacts to ensure they can provide appropriate support and understanding.



### Flexible scheduling

Allow for flexible schedules to accommodate medical appointments, unscheduled hospitalisations and events, and rest periods.

## About HeartKids

**HeartKids** is the only Australian not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting and advocating for families impacted by childhood-onset heart disease (CoHD). HeartKids provide support and resources for families of children with heart disease. Learn more about supporting students with CoHD here: [heartkids.org.au/support/schools-and-workplaces/](https://www.heartkids.org.au/support/schools-and-workplaces/)

You can find further resources for young people with CoHD here:  
<https://www.heartkids.org.au/support/young-people/>



## HeartKids Helpline and webchat

The HeartKids Helpline offers support and guidance to those impacted by Childhood-onset Heart Disease, including families, caregivers, health professionals, and anyone seeking information or referrals. Our team is here to listen and assist without judgment, ensuring everyone feels supported. Contact the Helpline on **1800 432 785** or speak to our staff on **webchat** via [heartkids.org.au](https://www.heartkids.org.au).

[heartkids.org.au](https://www.heartkids.org.au) | [1800 432 785](tel:1800432785) | [office@heartkids.org.au](mailto:office@heartkids.org.au) | © HeartKids

This fact sheet was reviewed and updated by HeartKids in June 2024. It was endorsed by the HeartKids Clinical Advisory Committee at the time of publication. Clinical information might change after this date. The information in this fact sheet is general. It is not a substitute for medical advice from your doctor. Always talk to your doctor about matters that affect your or your family's health. Have feedback about our resources? Contact [office@heartkids.org.au](mailto:office@heartkids.org.au).